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OR,

The King Pin Conspirator.

A Tale of the Rowdy West.

BY COL. ARTHUR F. HOLT,
AUTHOR OF "BLACK BUCKSKIN," "LITTLE
LIGHTFOOT," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

IN SPIRIT CANYON.

"WHOO! G'lang thar, ye lazy brutes, er I'll lash yer 'tarnal hides inter shoe-strings. I'll learn yer better'n ter try ter go ter sleep when Rocky Tom hez got a grip on ther ribbons. Git up, thar! Thet's ther bizness! Hooray!"

It was a harsh, discordant voice that, mingling with the sharp crack of a whip and the rumble of heavy wheels, echoed and re-echoed from the gloomy walls of Spirit Canyon.

THE DANDY SPORT WAS SEIZED AND BORNE IN TRIUMPH THROUGH THE TOWN, FROM WHENCE, BUT A FEW HOURS BEFORE, HE HAD BEEN DRIVEN—AN EXILE.

A scene wild and picturesque it was; far, far up on either side towered the rugged walls of the canyon, upon which fell the slanting rays of the descending summer sun. At one side of the gulch yawned a chasm, from the depths of which the murmur of swiftly flowing water was faintly audible; beside the abyss ran the rude mountain trail, so narrow at places that it seemed but a mere bridle-path upon the side of the precipice.

Along this perilous way, rapidly drawn by three powerful horses, moved a ponderous stage-coach. Perched on the lofty driver's seat, a stalwart, roughly-clad mountaineer guided his flying animals; urging them on with whip and voice.

From his maudlin speech and reckless driving, it was plain that Rocky Tom had indulged in more "tanglefoot" than was good for him; and this fact had not failed to impress itself upon the three passengers who had intrusted themselves to the guidance of the dare-devil Jehu.

Two of the number, without doubt companions, sat within the vehicle.

One was a man of fifty, with a strong and massive frame and the air of one used to command; he wore a heavy beard; and a pair of sharp eyes twinkled from under shaggy brows, while his features denoted great energy and shrewdness, hampered by but very few conscientious scruples.

Just the reverse in appearance was the young lady who sat by his side.

Scarcely twenty, lithe and graceful as a fairy, she was a fitting subject for the artist's pencil. Her features were perfection itself, her azure eyes sparkled like twin stars, while a wealth of golden hair formed a fitting crown for a face so fair.

The last of the trio, who is deserving of more than passing notice, sat upon the seat beside the driver; yet, had his position been less conspicuous, such was this passenger's appearance that he would attract attention anywhere.

He was a young man, apparently, of three-and-twenty. He was slightly above the medium height, and possessed a figure that, though frail and slender, gave promise of considerable strength and activity.

His face, slightly pale, was by no means unhandsome, while his dark eyes flashed with the light of intelligence and good nature. His hair was dark and wavy, and his upper lip supported a dainty mustache carefully waxed to a point.

There was nothing remarkable about the form or features of the youth; it was his habiliments that had excited the curiosity and admiration of the residents at the station where he had boarded the coach for Canyon City.

He wore a swallow-tail coat of faultless fit; a satin vest as immaculate as the driven snow; a pair of pantaloons of gorgeous pattern, so tight that it seemed almost a miracle how the wearer had ever managed to get inside of them; a light hat of latest style rested upon his wavy locks; lavender gloves incased his hands, small and delicate as a woman's, and his patent leather shoes were polished until they shone like a mirror; a gaudy neck-tie, spotless cuffs and a collar of enormous width went to complete the attire of this traveling phenomenon.

A heavy gold chain dangled from his fob, while from his bosom a diamond sparkled with wondrous brilliancy. In short, he was a genuine specimen of the genus dude, and as he sailed along upon his lofty perch, twirling a silver-headed cane in his dainty fingers, as he puffed languidly at a cigarette, his appearance was gorgeous in the extreme.

Such a spectacle was by no means common in that wild region, and when the dandy had climbed onto the coach at Jump-off Station, "so as to get the fresh air and enjoy the beautiful scenery, doncher know," surly Rocky Tom had expressed his opinion of him in language more forcible than polite.

"Darn my old trowsers, but things hev cum to a pretty pass when sich specimens as this air allowed to roam 'round unconfin'd. It beats me all holler ter see what earthly use they kin be, onless," as a brilliant idea struck him, "they kin be used by er tailor fur a walkin' sign, er else sot up fer a target in a shootin'-gallery. I'd give an ounce er dust jest fer one shot at ther critter myself. Ugh! If he dares ter bother me with his infernal stuck-uppishness, I'll chuck him inter Satan's Kettle, cane, collar an' all. Hang me fer a Dutchman if I don't!"

However, the belligerent Jehu was spared any cause for such energetic action, for the dandified traveler who was evidently of a quiet and peaceable disposition, never once vouchsafed a remark to his companion, seeming totally

wrapped in his cigarettes and contemplation of the grand and beauteous mountain scenery.

On rattled the stage through the gathering shadows. Rocky Tom had imbibed just enough of the ardent to make him reckless, and he urged on his three-in-hand with whip and voice until the canyon rung.

The road was a perilous one to traverse under the most favorable circumstances; to guide a coach in perfect safety required a cool head and a steady hand. Small wonder, then, that the frightened passengers, realizing the tipsy condition of their driver, heartily wished themselves safe at their destination.

Of the three, the dude on the box was the coolest. Seemingly unconscious of the danger, he puffed serenely at his "Old Judge," much to the disgust of the Jehu, who had anticipated considerable amusement at his expense.

However, as the stage reached the dismal chasm that rejoiced in the fitting title of Satan's Kettle, and the trail narrowed until the wheels of the vehicle seemed to dance upon the very brink of the abyss, the young man might have been seen to glance nervously about as if awakening to a true sense of the situation.

Rocky Tom, on the alert for some sign of weakening, was quick to observe it, and a grin stole over his face.

"Ther ninny hez got more grit than I give him credit for, but he's a-beginnin' ter crawfish," he muttered, and then deliberately guided the coach over a spur of rock that he might easily have avoided.

There was a terrific jolt—a jar that nearly jerked the rickety concern to pieces, followed from the interior by a feminine shriek of terror.

Then, for the first time during the journey, the thoughts of the Dandy Sport found utterance.

"I say, my good fellow," he began, quietly, "will you be kind enough to exercise a little more care and judgment? It's deucedly unpleasant for a chap to have the breath jolted out of his body at every step, and, besides, there is the liability of landing us all the bottom of yonder chasm, don't you know?"

At this speech, Rocky Tom sat for an instant as if paralyzed, then giving vent to his feelings with a loud guffaw, as he turned his face toward that of the audacious youth.

"Look a-hyar, young feller," he growled, savagely, "lemme give yer a p'inter. I'd advise yer to bottle up yer chin-music fer futur' use, fer I'm Rocky Tom, ther high-cock-o-lorum of ther Canyon City trail, an' I don't allow no half-grown idiot in store clo'se ter dictate ter me. I'm a-runnin' this hyar hearse, an' she's got ter go through on time if I bu'st ther hull outfit. If yer don't like my style o' progression, yer kin git out an' walk. Yer never would be mis'ed!"

The belligerent Jehu expected that the recipient of this advice would immediately go into his boots, but, on the contrary, his words did not seem to intimidate the dude in the least. Instead, his dark eyes flashed, and a sarcastic smile played about his boyish lips.

"Your advice is right to the point, my friend, but I must decline to accept it. On the other hand, I insist on your taking mine. If you do not know enough to exercise due caution, especially when the life of a lady depends upon you, then it is time you were taught. Now, drive slower, if you please."

He spoke quietly but firmly, and his speech had much the same effect upon the driver as would a scarlet rag upon a rampant bovine.

With an angry roar that might have been heard a mile, Rocky Tom arose in his might, towering above the other, a veritable mountain of strength.

"Durn my eyes, yer 'tarnal monkey," he howled, as he elevated one ponderous fist, "I'll—I'll—"

Rocky Tom stopped abruptly, for the Dandy had made a single lightning-like movement of his arm, and the dumfounded Jehu now found himself glaring into the frowning tube of a seven-shooter.

Where the weapon came from was a mystery; but there it was, small and dainty, yet looking just as dangerous as the heaviest "six."

"Stop your horses instantly, or I'll scatter whatever brains you may have."

Sharp and resolute came the voice of the young traveler, and as the Jehu looked into the pair of flashing eyes that backed the glittering tube, he felt that the kid-glove sport was not so soft as he looked.

But whether or no the reckless driver would have obeyed the order will never be known, for at that moment an incident occurred that completely upset the calculations of all concerned.

In his eagerness to annihilate his enemy, Rocky Tom had left his team to take care of itself. Suddenly the leader stumbled, the others followed, and in less time than it takes to tell it, coach and horses were lying in a confused heap at the very brink of the chasm, while the air was filled with the neighing of steeds and agonized human cries.

Four persons sprang simultaneously from the overturning vehicle in a desperate scramble for safety.

The Dandy, with cane in one hand and pistol in the other, alighted upon his feet with the agility of an acrobat; but when he turned about, but one of his companions was in sight. It was the inside passenger, who had made his way out with an alacrity that was remarkable for one of his years.

Rocky Tom, howling in mortal terror, had gone whirling down into the dismal depths of Satan's Kettle, to a doom brought upon himself by his own recklessness.

The young lady had also disappeared, and as the Dandy noted this, he rushed forward with a cry of alarm.

"The young lady—where is she?" he breathlessly demanded. "Quick, man, have you seen her?"

The gentleman shuddered.

"Alas!" he gasped, greatly agitated. "I was about to assist her from the coach, when, crazy with fear, she sprang through the window on the opposite side. I fear she has gone over the precipice."

The youth darted to the brink, and, throwing himself upon the earth, peered into the dismal depths. Instantly a glad cry escaped his lips.

About twenty feet below the surface, his quick eye caught sight of a white object which he immediately recognized as being the light-colored outer garment worn by the missing girl.

By a strange interposition of ever-watchful Providence, the young lady's fall had been arrested by some indistinguishable object; and she now hung as if supported in mid-air, in plain view of those above.

Was she dead or living? This question, flashing unuttered through the minds of the two men was speedily answered by a low moan that came floating upward to their listening ears.

"Thank Heaven! she is alive!" murmured the traveler, fervently.

"Yes; but perhaps seriously injured," returned the Dandy. "We must lose no time in rescuing her from her present position."

While en route, he had observed a lariat, among other articles, lying in the "box," and procuring this, he proceeded to make the cord fast to a convenient spur of rock, while the other end he knotted firmly around his waist.

"Now, then, lower me over," he commanded, throwing off his hat and swallow-tail. "When you hear me whistle, you may know that I have her safe. Then haul away for dear life."

The rescuer was quickly lowered over the dizzy brink—down steadily, inch by inch, until at last the bold youth found himself dangling beside the motionless form, upon a narrow ledge where a hardy shrub had thriven, spreading its sturdy branches outward in various directions; and upon these the falling form of the girl had alighted and remained.

At once he grasped the inanimate form in his strong arms, and gave the signal to hoist away.

The man above pulled with all his great strength, and soon the two were safely landed upon the rocks.

To restore the rescued one to consciousness was the next act, and while the young man chafed her hands and brow, his companion produced a flask of brandy, a liberal dose of which helped considerably to bring about the desired effect.

Examination showed that, beyond a number of scratches and slight bruises, the young lady had escaped injury; indeed, she declared her ability to continue the journey without further delay.

The Dandy now made haste to ascertain the condition of the coach and horses. The former and two of the latter were comparatively uninjured, but the leader lay upon the ground with a broken leg.

A bullet through the head soon put an end to his misery, and then the two men went to work to right the overturned vehicle.

This, an exceedingly difficult task, was successfully accomplished, and everything was put in readiness to resume the journey.

"Now," said the Dandy, when all was complete, "if you will have the goodness to resume your seats, I will try my hand at the reins. I'm rather green at the business, I fear, but will do

my best to convey you to Canyon City in safety."

As they hastened to enter the coach, the travelers were profuse in their thanks to their young benefactor for his earnest efforts in their behalf.

"I will not insult you by offering you money, for I plainly see that you are a gentleman," said the old gentleman; "but rest assured we will not forget your courtesy. My name is Reginald Ray, and this is Rachel, my niece. We shall both be pleased to see you at any time during our stay in Canyon City."

"Yes, indeed; come often as you may, you will be none the less welcome," supplemented the young lady earnestly.

"Thank you. I shall not forget to avail myself of your kind invitation, I assure you," declared the Dandy. "Here is my card—Algernon Arnold at your service. *Au revoir!*"

Gallantly tipping his hat to Rachel, the young man leaped to the box and grasped the lines with the air of one who was no stranger to the business.

Proceeding carefully at first until the end of Satan's Kettle was reached, he bowled along at a rapid pace until at length the weary passengers saw the lights of Canyon City twinkling like fireflies in the distance.

CHAPTER II.

CANYON CITY.

THE shades of night were fast falling, as the rough-and-ready, inhabitants of Canyon City began to congregate in front of the "hotel," whose creaky sign bore the title "Pick and Shovel," to await the arrival of the west-bound stage.

Shut off as they were from the outside world by the mountain walls that encompassed their little camp, these hardy miners were always ready to observe the most common events as a means of relieving the tedium of their humdrum existence; consequently the announcement that Rocky Tom was coming generally proved sufficient to attract half the town's population.

Seldom it was that the coach ever brought a passenger so far as Canyon City, for the camp had seen its palmy days, but, nevertheless, Rocky Tom was always sure of a hearty welcome.

On this particular occasion, "stage time" failed to bring the well-known Jehu and his three-in-hand. Rocky Tom was late, and as the moments flew by and darkness settled over the camp, without a sign of the belated stage-coach, the worthy citizens began to grow uneasy.

Never before in the career of Rocky Tom had he been so far behind time, for the driver, although rash and reckless, had always managed to "git thar;" therefore his non-arrival furnished food for no little conjecture.

However, the miners were not to be kept always in suspense, for after an hour of anxiety had been passed, the welcome sound of wheels reached their listening ears.

"Hooray! Thar she cums, sure as shootin'."

"For Tom kin drive a three-in-hand,
A balky horse or lame;
A burro or a wild cayuse.
An' he'll git thar jest the same."

quoeth one pilgrim, somewhat poetically inclined. "Gee—whiz! Hear him cum! No one but Rocky Tom could drive like that."

But the poetic one was mistaken; for as the stage rolled up, a murmur of surprise rose from a hundred throats, for they saw that the driver was not Rocky Tom, but a perfect stranger.

Standing erect upon the foot-board, his feet firmly braced, and his coat-tails flying wild in the breeze, Algernon Arnold created no little sensation, as he dashed through the narrow street and drew up at the "Pick and Shovel," with all the ease and skill of a veteran knight of the ribbons.

"Who is it?—what is it?"

"Shure an' it must be wan of thim things they call a dude."

"Or a tailor's sign—"

"Or mebbe it's an angel in disguise."

These and countless other remarks, all more or less complimentary, greeted the dandy stranger in a perfect shower; but immediately after all sense of the ridiculous was lost sight of in the face of the more serious question:

"Where is Rocky Tom?"

From a score of throats came the query, spoken as if in one voice, as Algernon Arnold leaped gracefully from his perch and confronted the excited men of Canyon City.

"Gentlemen," he exclaimed, clearly, "if it is the driver for whom you are inquiring, it is my painful duty to inform you that he is lying at the bottom of the canyon. Through his careless-

ness the coach was upset, and it was only by a miracle that myself and fellow-passengers were saved from following him over the precipice. We succeeded in righting the coach with considerable difficulty, and here we are. These are the cold facts, gents, as my companions will tell you."

"Yes; everything happened as this young man states," agreed Reginald Ray, who was at that moment assisting his niece from the coach; and then without further words the couple pushed through the gaping crowd and disappeared within the "Pick and Shovel."

And Algernon Arnold lost but little time in following their example. The miners were earnestly discussing the tragic end of Rocky Tom, who was a general favorite; so for a time the dudish stranger was forgotten. The latter was quick to see his opportunity, and made his way into the hotel.

He succeeded in getting clear of the crowd without attracting attention, and, procuring an apartment, prepared for a night of rest.

"Well, well!" he muttered. "This has been an eventful day. Adventures bid fair to pour in upon me even faster than I ever dreamed of when I started on this hap-hazard trip. Now to bed, and to-morrow I'll take in the sights of Canyon City. I imagine I shall find the climate beneficial so long as pretty Rachel remains. I believe I'm half in love with the little witch already."

In five minutes Algernon was fast asleep, dreaming of fresh adventures, in which the fair face of Rachel Ray constantly attended him like a beauteous vision.

The next morning he was up with the lark. His first thought was of his promised visit to his fair companion of the previous day, but supposing that she had not yet arisen, he determined to first take a stroll through the town.

So early was the hour that but few persons were astir, and the Dandy passed along the only street without incident.

Canyon City did not occupy much territory, and it was but a few minutes before Arnold passed the last straggling shanty and found himself in the wilder regions bordering on Spirit Canyon.

Strolling leisurely along, twirling his dainty cane, the young adventurer was suddenly made aware of the presence of a lady. She was seated on a log a hundred yards away, and Algernon gave a start of surprise, for he recognized Rachel Ray, whom he supposed to be fast asleep at the hotel.

She was apparently unaware of the young man's presence, and with twinkling eyes he stole forward, intending to give her a little surprise.

But as he drew nearer, Arnold was struck by the peculiar appearance of the maiden. She sat as rigid as a statue, with her hands, filled with wild flowers, folded across her lap. Indeed, she would have seemed to be asleep but for the fact that her eyes were wide open and staring apparently at some object before her.

Wondering what could so attract the young lady's attention, Algernon eagerly scanned the ground in front of her.

He saw an expanse of rocks and sand, a mass of shrubs and bushes, a tree or two, and—ah! an object at sight of which the young man's blood ran cold.

Curled up on the ground but a few feet from the motionless girl, its hideous head uplifted and moving with a peculiar oscillating motion, was coiled an enormous rattlesnake—the pest of the border.

The reptile had so frightened the girl that she could do nothing but look into those devilish eyes, powerless to move a muscle to save herself.

Not a second did Algernon Arnold hesitate, and like a flash the young man's hand closed upon a revolver handle.

The swaying head of the serpent was a difficult mark; but the hand that gripped the pistol was as firm as steel.

Crack! And the smoke clearing away revealed the rattlesnake writhing and squirming upon the ground, its head wholly shot away.

At the shot, Rachel struggled bewilderedly to her feet, and—the Dandy clasped her in his arms!

"Don't be excited, Miss Ray," he admonished. "You are safe now, though I must confess I wouldn't have enjoyed your position a minute ago. It's lucky I happened this way."

The girl's face wore an expression of heartfelt gratitude as she looked up into that of her rescuer.

"How much I owe to you, sir!" she exclaimed. "For the second time within twenty-four hours have you saved me from a horrible fate."

Young Arnold laughed lightly as he threw the mangled reptile away with his cane.

"It must be that Providence has appointed me your guardian angel," he laughed. "But, come, now that all danger is past, please resume your seat and tell me how it is that you are so far from the camp, and, too, at a time when you ought to be wrapt in pleasant dreams."

Rachel laughed musically.

"I am an early riser as you have seen. Nothing pleases me better than a nice long walk before breakfast, and especially when I can enjoy such grand and picturesque scenery as this. So this morning, knowing that my uncle would never allow me to come out alone, I took advantage of his sound slumber, stole from the house, and—here I am."

"Yes; and your disobedience nearly cost you your life," declared Arnold, gravely. "However, there's no harm done, and I trust your uncle will not scold you for your foolishness."

"Oh, no, indeed. Uncle Reginald never scolds me. He is very kind—as much so as my own father could have been."

"Then your own parents are not living, Miss Ray?"

"Alas, no! My mother died when I was but a babe, and my father followed her a few years after. He was a miner, I am told; and when he died, left me in charge of his brother, with whom I have lived ever since, in New York."

"Indeed! And how happens it that you are traveling through this wild country, so far away from home? You will pardon my inquisitiveness, I hope, when I tell you that I am very much interested in you and your proceedings."

A troubled expression swept over the girl's fair face, and she hesitated a moment before making response.

"I cannot answer your question, sir, for truth to tell I do not know myself what brings us here. I came simply because my uncle bade me do so."

"Indeed! And did he give no reason for taking the journey?"

"None whatever. He simply said that business called him to the West, and bade me prepare to accompany him. The only clue I have to his object is this telegram, which I picked up in the coach yesterday, it having fallen from his pocket."

The young lady produced a sheet of paper and tendered it to her companion for perusal. It was one of the familiar yellow strips of the W. U. T. C. and bore the following message:

"DENVER, COL., June 8, 1886.

"REGINALD RAY, Esq.,

No. — Fifth avenue, N. Y.:—

"Come to Canyon City at once. Big bonanza. Bring the girl. CARLETON."

Algernon Arnold regarded the telegram with considerable interest.

"Well," he exclaimed, as he returned the paper, "I should say that it was business of a most urgent character that called your uncle hither; and, besides, from the reading of this message it is evident that you are particularly concerned, for doubtless you are the girl referred to."

Rachel nodded absently; her appearance showed that her mind was troubled.

"Perhaps you may think me foolish, Mr. Arnold," she said, after a pause, "but you have proved yourself a gentleman, and I feel that I can safely confide in you."

"You can trust me with your life, Miss Ray," declared the young man, earnestly.

"I wish I had never come here. I did not wish to come at first, and now since discovering that message my mind is filled with a presentiment of coming danger. I know it is childish, but try as I may I cannot shake it off."

"Do you know this Carleton, as he signs himself?"

"No; I never heard the name mentioned by uncle."

"And does your uncle always treat you well, Miss Ray?" queried the sport, whose brain was busy at work.

"He never spoke a cross word to me in his life," declared Rachel; "though he is much disliked by many, who call him sharp and avaricious, yet he never refuses me anything. I believe he fairly worships me."

"Then I can see no cause for anxiety on your part," exclaimed young Arnold. "So far as that is concerned, you may set your fears at rest. That there is danger enough in this wild country I will not deny; your recent experience has proved that. But that was accident; the idea that any one is doing you ill, as you seem to think, is perfectly absurd."

"I will try and think as you do, Mr. Arnold,

but I fear it will be impossible. Coming events cast their shadows before, you know, and the sense of approaching evil clings to me like a phantom."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the young man, laughingly. "You are nervous. Take my advice, return to the hotel and remain there until you have recovered from the effects of your last night's adventures. Then you will see how quickly these evil shadows will disappear."

"I will do so. It was very thoughtless in me to venture out. Let us hasten back, for I fear uncle will be worried about me."

"With pleasure, Miss Ray," and Algernon offered his arm with profuse gallantry.

The return was soon made, altogether too quickly for the sport, who found great pleasure in conversing with the fair girl by his side. With the desire to cheer up the girl's depressed spirits, he chatted gayly upon every conceivable topic. He told her he was a New Englander, a graduate of fair Harvard, traveling through the West for the double purpose of adventure, and to recruit his health, which had become somewhat impaired by too close application to study.

The young man was not entirely unsuccessful, and when they reached the "Pick and Shovel" he had the satisfaction of noting that Rachel had recovered some of her customary good spirits.

"I will say good-by for the present, Miss Ray," he said, as he turned to go. "Be of good cheer, and remember, should anything happen that you should need my aid, I shall not fail to be on hand. *Au revoir!*"

Tipping his hat, Algernon Arnold walked lightly away, but as he did so he felt that he had left his heart in the keeping of fair Rachel Ray.

CHAPTER III.

TOMMY THE KID.

EMERGING from the "Pick and Shovel," the Dandy Sport once more made his way along the street. His active brain was busy with thoughts of Rachel, her somber uncle, and the mysterious telegram.

Algernon Arnold had laughed at the girl's fears, but it was in view of relieving her anxiety that he had done so; truth to tell, he believed that message had more significance than he pretended.

"Bring the girl," it said, and it was this sentence that impressed the youth unfavorably. This man who signed himself "Carleton" evidently had some particular object in desiring the presence of the young lady. What could it be?"

The more he pondered upon the matter, the stronger grew his suspicion that there was some evil scheme at the bottom of it all. True, it might be a mere fancy, but the young collegian was determined, nevertheless, to keep an eye on Reginald Ray, find out the identity of Carleton, and then ascertain, if possible, the object of the former's sudden visit to Canyon City.

"Perhaps I am an idiot for allowing this singular idea to possess me," he soliloquized, "but somehow I cannot shake it off. I don't half like the looks of that Reginald Ray, in spite of Rachel's protestations as to his extreme goodness, and I mean to keep a watchful eye on his movements. Ah! what's all this racket about?"

Excited cries, seeming to come from behind a neighboring shanty, suddenly interrupted the young man's soliloquy, followed by sounds as of a violent struggle.

Arnold's inquisitiveness was aroused, and without hesitation he dashed around a corner of the building, to behold a lad struggling in the grasp of two drunken ruffians.

The lad was making a plucky fight, but his pigmy efforts were of little avail. The object of the assault was robbery; for while one burly fellow held the struggling boy, the other was "going through" his pockets.

Such was the situation when the Dandy appeared upon the scene; his blood boiled with indignation at the sight, and he proceeded to participate in the rumpus without ceremony.

Darting swiftly forward, he clutched the nearest ruffian by the collar, and exerting a strength that seemed almost incredible in one so slight of build, dragged him off his prostrate victim.

"Fair play here, you coward hounds!" he cried; and almost before the fuddled brain of the tough could comprehend what had happened, Arnold sent him spinning through the air like a top.

Whirling round and round, the fellow sudden-

ly "went to grass;" his head struck against a rock, and he lay there motionless, stunned by the fall.

But the remaining tough was not to be disposed of so easily. Algernon's tremendous effort caused him to momentarily lose his balance, and when he recovered, it was to find himself looking into the menacing barrel of a revolver, backed by a face whose expression was fairly demoniacal.

"Ho, ho!" laughed the scoundrel, triumphantly. "Fair play, hey? You'll git it, yer durned, meddlin' jack-in-a-box."

For a moment it seemed as if the dude was destined to come out second best this time, for the other had him nicely covered; but help came from an unexpected quarter.

In his eagerness to wreak vengeance on the intruder, the ruffian had released his hold upon his victim; and now the boy, quick to improve his chance, suddenly shot upward like a stone from a catapult. His head caught the tough full in the pit of the stomach, with a force that nearly knocked the breath from his body, and sent him staggering to the ground, the revolver falling harmlessly from his grasp.

When he regained his feet, it was to find himself covered by his own weapon, in the hand of the dude.

"You cowardly vagabond," exclaimed the latter, his dark eyes flashing fire, "I've a good mind to shoot you down like a cur. As it is, I'll give you thirty seconds to get out of sight. Be off!" and the scoundrel wisely lost no time in obeying the stern command, uttering deep and vicious imprecations against the triumphant sport as he sneaked around the cabin and disappeared.

Arnold turned to the youth whom he had assisted. He was apparently eighteen, but small for his years; short and "chunky," and possessed of more than youthful strength. His brown eyes sparkled intelligently, while his face would undoubtedly have been handsome after a proper introduction to soap and water.

As for the lad's dress, it was simple in the extreme. A well-worn shirt of red flannel; a pair of tattered trousers, held in place by a piece of rope that answered the purpose of a belt; a battered felt hat that had seen the wear and tear of years, through a hole in which his hair stuck up in wild confusion; that was all, and yet this barefoot waif of the mines seemed as happy and contented as if dressed in the finest broadcloth.

He stood rubbing his head where it had come into contact with the bummer's stomach, as he stared at his benefactor with an expression of most ludicrous astonishment.

"Saay, mister," he blurted out, "air ye er dood?"

So quaint was the query that Algernon could scarcely refrain from laughing outright.

"Perhaps I am, my friend," he returned, controlling his risibilities. "Why?"

"'Cause I've heard tell about 'em lots o' times," retorted the boy, in no wise abashed, "an' I allers tho't they wuz a lot o' walkin' pipe-stems, w'ot lived on toothpicks, an' hed ter hitch 'em-selves ter little pug dogs ter keep ther wind from blowin' 'em away, but—"

"Well?" interrogated the sport, amusedly, as the lad hesitated.

"Wal, I don't think you fill the bill. Ther thin legs is thar all right; so's ther big collar an' all ther rest, but hang me fur a hoss-thief, if I ever heard of a la-la who could make ther fur fly ther way you did just now. I don't believe you're a genuine, out-an'-out gusher, anyhow!"

"You mustn't judge a man by his looks, for appearances are oftentimes deceitful. By the way, suppose you tell me about this little scrimmage: what were these fellows doing when I came along?"

"Fishin' pockets fer keeps, I reckon," responded the youth, laconically, "Ye see, I jist won a V at poker off Hi Low, ther Chinaman. Then these two fellers laid fur me, an' told me ter ante up ther boodle. I didn't see it that way, an' kicked like a steer, but I reckon if you hadn't cum along, I'd hed ter borry a stake afore I could buck ther tiger ag'in."

"And are you not hurt?"

"Not much; only my head swins a little since I butted Sneaky Sam in ther bread-basket. Holy smoke! That feller must 'a' made his breakfast offer tenpenny nails an' stove covers."

"I'm glad I happened along in time to help you," said the Dandy. "Here, take the rascal's pistol; then you will be better prepared to defend yourself in the future."

The lad eagerly seized the proffered weapon. "Now I feel like myself ag'in," he remarked, as he thrust the shooter within his gaudy shirt. "I uster hev a six onc't, ov my own, all silver

plate 'ith gold trimmin's; but it went fer poker chips long ago."

"You gamble? I'm afraid you're a hard ticket."

The boy drew himself up proudly.

"I'm er rooster, I am, an' don't yer forget it. They calls me Tommy the Kid, 'cause I'm so little, but allee samee I know as much as ther oldest ov 'em about life in these hyar diggin's."

Algernon laughed; the independent ways of this mountain boy interested and amused him. Besides, he believed that in him he had found a friend it would do to "tie to."

"Well, Tommy, I'm glad you are so well posted. You may be able to give me some valuable pointers concerning affairs in Canyon City. Will you do it?"

Tommy's reply was to grasp the other's hand in a hearty clasp.

"Will I? Will a fish swim? If there's anything yer want me ter do, just ask it. You've done me a good turn, an' after this I'm with yer, ev'ry time."

"Good enough! I see no reason why we shouldn't be the best of friends. Suppose, to commence with, that you show me round a little. I am desirous of knowing what manner of place I have wandered into."

Tommy the Kid grinned broadly.

"Wanter see ther ellerfant, hey?"

"That's it, precisely."

"Cum on, then! Bizness is kinder dull to-day, an' I reckon it'll serve ter kill time."

The Kid led the way down the street with Arnold close at his side. The fallen ruffian had not yet recovered consciousness, and the two were pleased to note that the recent fracas had attracted no attention.

"I suppose you live with your folks, Tommy," said the sport, as they walked along.

"Folks? Humph! Never had any! Allers hev b'en kickin' round hyar since I kin remember. 'Spect they found me hyar when ther first settlers cum. I'm a happy-go-lucky kid, here, there an' everywhere, an' allers a-gettin' in somebody's way. I reckon they likes ter pick on me 'cause I'm small. But I generally manage ter git thar, jest the same."

"Then if you have lived here all your life you must be pretty well acquainted with the inhabitants."

"I reckon I'm on ter ev'ry mother's son ov 'em—knows 'em like a book."

"Then you know a man named Carleton?" asked the Dandy, eagerly.

"Carleton! Let's see—oh, yes, I guess you mean Cool Carl, eh?"

"Perhaps. Who is he? What can you tell me of him?"

"Might know you war a stranger hyar, if you never heard of Cool Carl. He's a gambler—ther bossiest card-juggler in these parts. He runs a shebang over yonder, an' owns half the camp besides. Sort over lord high executioner; hez everybody under his thumb, ye see."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; but hyar we are at his place. Mebbe Cool Carl is inside. Wanter cum in?"

The sport nodded.

"Lead on, Tommy," he exclaimed. "I have great curiosity to gaze on the great Mogul of Canyon City."

The building before which they halted was only a plain wooden structure, but it was the most pretentious one in town. Over the broad door a gilt lettered sign informed the passer-by that this was "The Miners' Home," while underneath hung a huge red light, which at night dispelled the gloom for many yards around.

Tommy the Kid pushed open the door with a confidence that betokened his thorough knowledge of the premises, and Arnold followed close at his heels.

They found themselves in a long and rather narrow apartment, in which the business of gaming and liquor dealing were combined.

At one side, near the door, a bar was constructed, over which a dirty, low-browed individual dispensed liquid lightning to whosoever thirsted.

At the furthest end were several plain tables, to accommodate those whose passion for gambling drew them nightly to the "Miners' Home."

When the eastern sport and his newly-found friend made their appearance, the fun was in full blast; the tables were all occupied, the bartender was doing a rushing business, while the space between the bar and the tables was well-filled with idlers.

There were miners, gamblers, adventurers, bummers—men of all lands and climes, conversing boisterously upon various subjects, while the air was blue with the smoke of

vile tobacco, and coarse oaths and jests resounded on every hand.

It was a scene wild and picturesque, yet one to be seen in any mining-town; but to Algernon Arnold fresh from the polished society of the East, it was fraught with much that was strange and interesting.

As Algernon Arnold and Tommy the Kid entered the Miners' Home, they were met by a person in the act of leaving the place. The boy touched the arm of his companion.

"That's him—that's Cool Carl," he whispered.

Our friend regarded the gambler with considerable interest.

He was a tall, muscular man of five-and-forty, with the frame of a gladiator, and a face whose expression resembled that of a sleeping tiger, indicative of the most malignant hatred when once aroused to anger.

A mass of long, jetty hair fell from beneath his jaunty slouch hat and hung about his neck; a pair of piercing eyes twinkled shrewdly from under shaggy brows, while a piratical mustache, long and sweeping, went to increase the fierce expression of his swarthy countenance. He was attired in new and expensive garments, and a small fortune in the shape of jewelry flashed in the brilliant light.

Cool Carl came down the floor with the haughty bearing of one conscious of his own supremacy, and passed through the door, bestowing as he did so, a half-curious, half-contemptuous glance upon the young dandy from the East.

The latter, not in the least abashed, returned the stare with interest.

"So that is Cool Carleton, the King-Pin of Canyon City!" he thought. "Surely, Reginald Ray can be no angel if he has relations with a man of his stamp. One look into the gambler's face tells me that he is capable of almost any crime. But look out, Cool Carl. Be your intentions good or ill, I've got my eye on you!"

CHAPTER IV.

EXILED.

ALGERNON ARNOLD presented an appearance the like of which was rarely seen in a Western camp, and when the young man entered the saloon he immediately became the cynosure of all eyes; while at the same time the rough-and-ready crowd assembled there proceeded to make him the target for a running fire of remarks, all of them more or less uncomplimentary.

"What is it?"

"A scarecrow—"

"Er a tailor's dummy—"

"Er mabbe it's er New York alderman in disguise."

"Does yer mammy know ye'r' out?"

"Poke him with a stick, somebody, an' see if he'll jump."

"Sa-ay, Tommy, whar'd ye find it, anyway?"

And countless other remarks, all spoken at once in a manner more forcible than elegant, assailed the ears of the Dandy Sport, who, standing in the middle of the floor, carelessly twirled his dainty cane as he listened to the Babel of voices with an amused expression upon his face.

"Gentlemen," he said, as soon as the chatter had in a measure subsided, "I see by your demonstrations that you are glad to see me. It gives me great pleasure to be so heartily welcomed to your thriving city."

Then, waving his hand toward the bar, Arnold concluded:

"Friends, I don't indulge myself; but won't you condescend to irrigate at my expense?"

The Dandy spoke with a nonchalance that was refreshing, and, as he finished, tossed a bill of large denomination at the open-mouthed bar-keeper.

For a moment silence reigned so deep that a falling pin might have been plainly heard. The Easterner's response to their jeers and laughter was so strange and unexpected to the Canyon Cityites, that for a space it fairly took their breath away.

Nothing can appeal so directly to the better side of a Westerner's nature as an invitation to drink. Whether by accident or design, Algernon adopted the most fortunate course possible, and instantly the tide of popular sentiment changed from ridicule to admiration.

It did not take the miners long to recover from their surprise, and that they had no scruples about accepting Arnold's invitation was shown by the alacrity with which the crowd swarmed around the bar.

"Hooray for ther dood!" was the universal

cry, and for the next minute naught was heard save the clinking of glasses and the gurgle of liquor down thirsty throats.

Well pleased at the result, young Arnold leaned against the wall and was complacently regarding the scene, when suddenly the door flew open with a bang, and a new-comer rushed noisily into the Miners' Home.

Ragged, unshorn and dirty, he was a good specimen of the genus bummer; but he possessed the frame of a giant, and his arms were like sledge-hammers. He could safely be set down as a tough customer to handle.

"Jerusalem! Hyar cums Pretty Paul, ther fightin'-cock," whispered Tommy the Kid, as the ruffian burst into the room like a miniature whirlwind. "He's a holy terror when he once gets started, an' nobody in camp dares say 'boo' ter him, 'cept Cool Carl. He's chock-full o' tanglefoot, so lay low and look out fer fun."

Pretty Paul pranced over the floor with the air of one who felt his own importance; he had been drinking—enough to fully arouse the devil in his naturally quarrelsome nature.

"Hooray, boys!" he bellowed. "Hyar I cum, Pretty Paul, the lord high executioner o' Canyon City, an'— Hello! Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho! Am I awake or am I dreamin'?—am I hyar, or am I summers else? Pard, what d'ye call this?—a monkey in clothes? Hang me if I knowed the circus hed cum ter town."

The last of the bully's speech was caused by sight of the dude, before whom Pretty Paul halted, with arms akimbo and face indicative of ludicrous astonishment.

"Barnum oughter keep his curiosities chained up; how bad ther ole man must feel ter lose this specimen. Say, sonny," as the subject of his discourse, wholly unconcerned, continued to face him with an icy stare, "wake up an' say somethin'. I'd have yer know, young feller, that I'm Pretty Paul, ther king-pin o' this hyar camp, an' when I condescend ter talk to a kid, he's gotter answer civil."

A titter ran through the assembled throng. Knowing the ruffian as they did, they anticipated considerable amusement at the dandy tenderfoot's expense.

As for Algernon Arnold, he paid not the slightest attention to his stalwart interlocutor; the fact exasperated Pretty Paul.

"Durn yer skin, yer stuck-up corner statue!" he howled. "I'll make yer move!"

Deliberately the ruffian squirted about half a pint of tobacco-juice straight at the head of the youth from the East.

The latter sprang nimbly back, but not in time to prevent the filthy mess from splashing his immaculate shirt-front.

There was a flash in the eyes of Algernon that boded ill to the king-pin. Up went his arm, with the supple ratan cane, and the next instant the stick, swishing viciously through the air, fell square upon Pretty Paul's ugly physiognomy.

The boss bruiser leaped three feet into the air, with a loud yell, a livid welt appearing upon his cheek where the stick had struck; and from the crowd went up a murmur of astonishment, not unmingled with delight, for there was not much love lost for Pretty Paul in that crowd.

His ugly, quarrelsome spirit made him disliked as well as feared by many outside his own clique, and these took secret delight in his discomfiture.

With a terrible oath the ruffian rushed forward, the devil in his nature aroused, determined to seize the daring youth in his powerful arms and crush out his life.

Those who were acquainted with the giant's tactics, noted the contrast between the two, and looked for the instant annihilation of the presumptuous Dandy.

But the young man with the cane lightly leaped aside, and once more the ratan came down on Pretty Paul's visage, eliciting another howl.

Then ensued a scrimmage that afforded great amusement to the crowd of excited lookers-on.

Time and again did the infuriated king-pin dash blindly at his antagonist, striving to reach him with his long arms; but all his efforts proved fruitless.

Every time he was met by a shower of sharp, quick blows upon his head and neck, that stung and smarted as from the lash of a whip, while Algernon danced around him with the agility of a squirrel, seemingly enjoying his novel exercise.

For a few moments the scene was as exciting as the Miners' Home ever witnessed. Pretty Paul yelled and cursed as the blows fell thicker and faster, the spectators shouted in high glee,

while little Tommy the Kid could only stare at his new-made friend in speechless amazement.

"Wal, this is jest rich," the youngster told himself. "Hyar's this feller, a reg'lar, out-an'-out, sickly-looking dood; but now jest gaze on ther beautiful way he's a-doin' up ther fightin' cock! Hang me fer a Chinaman, but I don't understand it!"

Neither did the other on-lookers, but it was plain to the dullest mind, after a minute had elapsed, that the Dandy Sport had his big adversary completely at his mercy.

Just then, however, a badly-directed blow caught the ruffian upon the elbow, with a force that shattered the cane and left the young man empty-handed.

A cry of triumph pealed from the bully's throat as he saw his foe thus disarmed, and he made a final effort to improve his advantage; but Arnold had other weapons left, and he speedily demonstrated his ability to use them.

Avoiding the bruiser's rush with difficulty, he dashed in and planted his fist under his ear with all the force he could muster.

It was a terrific blow, and delivered in the right spot. Pretty Paul staggered, reeled to one side, made an ineffectual attempt to recover his equilibrium, then fell to the floor with a crash that shook the building, lying there breathless and half-stunned by the blow.

To say that the Canyon Cityites were surprised at the result of the novel encounter, would be to but inadequately express their feelings.

But the truth was undeniable. The invincible king-pin had met his match at last—completely knocked out by a meek-looking tenderfoot.

However, the programme for this eventful day was by no means over; more trouble was in store for the plucky young sport.

Scarcely had Pretty Paul struck the floor, and before any one could speak or move to raise the fallen ruffian, the tramping of heavy feet was heard outside, and a crowd of miners came surging into the saloon.

Algernon Arnold, standing near the door, was the first to meet their view.

"There he is, boys—that's him!" shouted the foremost man, a rough and bearded mountaineer, as he pointed at the dandy dude. "Forward, pard, an' corral ther cowardly skunk!"

With a yell the gang rushed toward the sport, who stood irresolute at this new turn of affairs.

Only for an instant did the young man lose his self-possession; the next, he had placed himself back to the wall, and with a revolver in either hand, faced the threatening mob.

"Stand back there, gentlemen! Don't advance another step, or some of you will pay the penalty!"

His voice rung out clearly and distinctly, and it struck the men who heard it that there was danger in the quiet tenderfoot, who handled his pair of "sixes" in a way that meant business.

At the same time, Tommy the Kid placed himself by the side of his friend, valiantly flourishing his pistols, while the other occupants of the saloon looked on, too surprised to lift a hand for either side.

The sport's belligerent attitude was not without effect. Death lurked in those grim revolvers, and, though the odds were greatly in the assailants' favor, it was certain that some of their number must fall ere the youth was captured.

Discreetly they paused half-way, glaring like famished wolves at the young man who stood at bay.

Arnold, however, was cool as an iceberg, as he confronted the angry mob.

"Gentlemen," he began, and his voice had not the slightest tremor, "before you chew me up piecemeal, won't you please inform me what I have done to warrant this warlike demonstration? If you will kindly condescend to enlighten my mind upon the subject, I will be infinitely obliged to you."

"You'll find it out soon enuff, young feller," retorted the leader of the party; then turning to the crowd, he continued:

"Feller-citizens, I accuse this man ov murderin' our pard, Rocky Tom, an' I calls on ye ter assist in his captur'."

At this startling announcement, the *habitués* of the Miner's Home roused as if they had received an electric shock. Rocky Tom, the lost stage-driver, was a prime favorite with all, and the words of Sandy Sam had the immediate effect of changing their friendly feeling to that of intense hatred to the youth who had knocked Pretty Paul. Transformed into veritable demons by the thirst for vengeance, the howling

mob massed themselves and rushed upon their victim in an irresistible body.

"Down with ther 'tarnal hound!" they yelled. "Kill him! String him ter ther nearest tree!" Firmly clutching his trusty weapon, Algernon Arnold braced himself to meet the terrible on-set.

But it came not! At this critical period, before his finger could press the trigger, the door flew open, and in rushed Cool Carl.

"Hold!"

As though by magic, every man paused, as the stern voice of the gambler rung through the room.

"What the deuce does this fandango mean?" demanded Cool Carl, angrily. "You, Sandy Sam, hurry up an' explain. What's this poor devil been doing, that you should turn my establishment into a slaughter-house?"

"Wal, sir, the facts are this," the miner indicated hastened to explain. "This feller drove ther stage inter camp last night, an' said as how they had been tipped over, an' Rocky Tom 'd gone over inter Satan's Kettle. Waal, we tuk a notion ter go an' find Tom, an' give his cadaver a sorter Christian-like burial, so we sot out early this mornin'."

"We found Rocky Tom at last, pretty well broke up; but we bolstered him up with bug-juice, an' kept life in him until he told us how it happened. He said es how a 'tarnal whipper-snapper ov er dood, which same is ther cuss over yonder, was a-ridin' on ther box with him. The chap war mad 'cause Tom wouldn't drive to suit him, an' pushed him off ther seat when he warn't a-lookin'."

"That's what Rocky Tom tole us, an' he begged us with his dyin' breath to avenge his death. An' we wuz just a-goin' ter do it when you cum' in. Eh, boys?"

"Ay! He killed Rocky Tom, an' he must swing for it," said a voice; and a threatening murmur arose from the eager mob.

But, with a wave of his hand, Cool Carl quelled the rising tumult.

"Silence!" he commanded. "Now, then," turning to Arnold, "what is your answer to this accusation?"

"Simply that it is a villainous lie," cried the young man, promptly. "The accident occurred precisely as I have related; and if Rocky Tom made that statement, he did so out of pure malice, and with the knowledge that every word was false."

"Well, boys," said the gambler, once more addressing the crowd, "you hear the stranger's denial. Rocky Tom accuses and the other denies, and thus the matter stands. It is simply one man's word against another's—one of them has lied. Which? It is your business to find that out first, not to jump at conclusions, and string up a perhaps innocent man."

"Now, let's proceed sensibly with this affair. Let twelve good men be selected as jurors, to discuss this case and decide it on its merits. If the young man be found guilty, let him hang; if, on the contrary, the court decides him innocent, then he shall go free. Fair play is my motto, and every man shall have it as long as I'm boss of the camp."

"Are you in accordance with my idea?"

For a moment there was silence; then arose a mighty yell that nearly raised the roof off the building.

"Cool Carl is boss—hooray for the King-Pin of Canyon City!"

Great indeed was the gambler's influence over that wild western rabble. By a few words he had accomplished what half a hundred armed men might have tried in vain, and Algernon Arnold could but feel that he owed his life to the interference of Cool Carl.

True, there were some of the more belligerent who were dissatisfied at the result; but not a dissenting murmur was heard, for the gambler's word was law.

"In the mean time," went on the latter, now addressing the cause of the disturbance, "you will please consider yourself a prisoner. You shall be treated well, you have my word for that; and, as for the final result, if you are innocent you need have no fear."

Arnold was fully alive to the embarrassing situation in which he was placed. It was simply foolhardiness to attempt to resist the entire town's population; while if he surrendered, with the leading spirit of the camp on hand to see fair play, he had no doubt of his ability to clear himself of the crime of which he was so wrongfully accused. Prudence urged the latter course, and the young man lowered his weapons without further delay.

"I surrender to you, sir," he said, "with the request that you put the business through as

rapidly as possible. I am not used to being looked upon as a murderer, and the sooner my skirts are cleared of suspicion, the better it will suit me."

Acting under orders from Cool Carl, two men disarmed the sport and escorted him from the saloon to a strongly-built cabin near the center of the camp.

There he was left, the rattle of bolts informing him that he was a close prisoner.

"Here's a pretty how-d'ye do!" grumbled Arnold, as he threw himself upon the floor; but his iron nature was not to be greatly disturbed by even this dangerous state of affairs, and he proceeded to await the verdict with philosophical indifference.

Peering through a chink in the wall, the young men surrounded the hut, ready to frustrate any attempt he might make to escape. Other buildings obstructed the view of the Miners' Home, but the subdued hum of excited voices reached his ears, and told him that the Canyon Cityites were having an earnest discussion.

At first young Arnold was inclined to laugh at the whole affair, regarding it a huge joke, as he thought how ridiculous was the charge against him; but as the afternoon wore on, he began to grow uneasy in spite of his assurance.

He was not wholly ignorant of the uncertainty of public sentiment among the mines, nor of the excessively practical ideas of justice in vogue. Therefore, it was with feelings of fast increasing anxiety that the Dandy Sport watched and waited.

The afternoon had passed and the shades of night were fast falling, when the tramp of approaching feet informed the impatient prisoner that the time was at hand.

The door was unfastened, and a rough voice ordered him to come forth; as he did so, he found himself in the presence of half a dozen miners.

"Well, how is it?" demanded Algernon, eagerly. "Am I guilty or not guilty?"

"Dunno! We war app'inted a committee ter fetch ye over ter the Miners' Home. The boys are a-waitin' fer ye thar. Cum along!"

Arnold followed without the least hesitation, and upon re-entering the saloon found the place fairly packed, nearly the entire town's population being centered there.

Cool Carl had disappeared, and in his place Sandy Sam, the miner, posed as master of ceremonies.

As the prisoner made his appearance, Sandy Sam mounted the bar and motioned the noisy crowd to silence.

"Prisoner at the bar," he began, impressively, "this hyar body of concentrated intelligence has deliberated upon your case, and is now prepared to give its decision. While we cannot fully prove that you caused ther death ov Rocky Tom, yet we know that you hev b'en ther cause ov more rumpus since ye cum ter town, than hev happened before fur a month. Therefore, we hev cum to ther conclusion that you are altogether too rich fer our blood, an' that Canyon City 'll manage ter git along without ther pleasure ov yer company."

So, Mister What's-ye -name, you are hereby acquitted, on condition that you leave the camp at once, never to return to it. If you are found within the limits of Canyon City to-morrow at daybreak, indications p'int to you as an active participant in er necktie picnic. Thar's the door!"

Algernon Arnold listened to the verdict with apparent unconcern. Greatly surprised and chagrined, yet he managed to conceal his true feelings most effectually, and as Sandy Sam finished speaking he smiled serenely on the delighted assembly.

"Gentlemen, I am pleased that you should let me off so easy," he said, sarcastically, "and I assure you I shall not forget your kindness. Perchance the time may come when you will be sorry for having turned an inoffensive stranger from your camp; but I bear no malice, and will at once relieve you of my unwelcome presence. *Au revoir!*"

Amid the laughs and jeers of the crowd, the Dandy Sport advanced deliberately to the door, lifted his hat with mock courtesy, then went from the Miners' Home—an exile.

CHAPTER V.

COOL CARL'S SCHEME.

WHILE Algernon Arnold was languishing in his temporary prison, and the excited citizens discussing the situation, Cool Carl the gambler quietly stole away from the crowd, and made his way straight to the "Pick and Shovel."

A man was seated upon the rude veranda

that was the pride and boast of the establishment; it was Reginald Ray, and as the "king" of Canyon City approached he started to his feet with a cry of recognition.

"Ah, Reggy, old boy, so you have come at last," said Cool Carl, suavely. "'Pon honor, I had given up all hope of seeing you."

"And it seems to me you had but little desire to do so, judging from your punctuality in calling. I have been in town since last night, and this is the first I have seen of you."

"A million pardons, my dear Reggy. Really, I have been so pressed with business, that this is the first opportunity I have had. Hope you will excuse me this time!"

"Well, now that you have come, let us proceed to business at once," said the New Yorker, eagerly. "I infer from your message that you have wonderful news in store for me."

Cool Carl's eyes twinkled merrily.

"That I have, Reggy," he replied. "But first let us seek a spot more adapted to secrecy than this. What I have to say is intended for your private ear alone."

The two left the veranda and moved away, finally seating themselves upon a mossy boulder on the outskirts of the camp.

"Now," said the merchant, "I am all attention. What is the big bonanza of which you hinted? Pray make haste and explain matters."

"The 'boss of the camp' smiled strangely.

"Have patience, old pard," he exclaimed, "and you shall know everything in good time. I know you believe there's something rich in store for you from the alacrity with which you obeyed my summons. You brought the girl, Rachel, I suppose?"

"Yes; but what has my niece to do with the matter?"

"Everything," responded the gambler, laconically, and a curious glitter, unobserved by the other, lighted his dark orbs. "Everything, my dear Reggy!"

"I do not understand you," declared Ray. "What mean you?"

"Listen, and I will make everything plain! But first, let it be understood that there shall be no disagreement between us. We know each other well. I am a scoundrel, I'll admit, but you are a greater one, Reginald Ray!"

The New Yorker started, and his face grew ashy pale.

"What nonsense is this, Carleton?" he cried. "What on earth are you coming at?"

Cool Carleton smiled sardonically.

"Do you forget the past?" he demanded, sternly. "Listen, then, while I refresh your memory."

"Go on!"

"As you well know, Reggy, this is not the first time you have visited this region. Twenty long years ago, or nearly, we stood upon this very spot together, when the land was but a wilderness, and our only companions were the wolves and coyotes. You had a brother then; where is he now? Speak! Where is Robert Ray?"

The merchant had buried his head in his hands, and his whole frame was quivering like an aspen.

"Stop, Carleton," he cried. "For Heaven's sake don't bring up the awful past. God knows my conscience has troubled me enough since that night. Say no more about it, Carleton."

"Let me finish my narrative, Reggy," continued the gambler, with a fendish grin. "I see your memory has not failed you after all these years, and nothing gives me more pleasure than to talk over the past with the friends of my youth."

"To resume: Twenty years ago you, with your brother, came to this country, lured from your Eastern homes by the same prospects of wealth that attracted thousands of others. Your brother, Robert, brought with him his wife and babe. Leaving them at Denver, he accompanied us on a prospecting trip into the mountains. Here, in what is now Canyon City, we struck it rich."

"You know what followed. One day you quarreled with your brother; soon after, he was lucky enough to turn up an enormous nugget, worth a fortune. By right of discovery, it belonged to him, only; but filled with a fierce hatred, you conspired with me to rob him of his treasure. We set upon him one dark night, down in yonder gulch, and in the scrimmage Robert Ray was pushed over the precipice. His bones are turned to dust at the bottom of Satan's Kettle, and yours, Reggy, was the hand that sent him to death!"

"It's false! You pushed him over yourself, Cool Carl."

"Well, it's all the same thing," returned the gambler, coolly. "You were the instigator, and I the willing tool. Which is the worse?"

A deep groan was Ray's sole response.

"Pricks you, does it?" laughed Cool Carl, demoniacally. "Sorry you have such sensitive feelings. Well, to wind up my harrowing tale, I will say that you returned to Denver, managing to take with you the lion's share of the boodle, while I was left to look after the claim. You told a pitiful yarn to Robert's wife about his accidental fall from a precipice, and she, poor thing, the shock killed her. You took the little girl and returned to New York, invested your ill-gotten gains, and prospered. I disposed of the claims at considerable profit, and have since lived on the fruits of my nimble fingers, relying on the earnings of these poor fools, to whom my word is law.

"Such has been our history, Reginald Ray. Quite a romance, is it not?"

"Curse you, man, why do you tell me this?" exclaimed the merchant, excitedly. "Can it be that you have sent for me, simply to torture me with recollections of the past? Certainly you can bear no ill-will toward me, for I did the square thing by you."

"Of course you did, old pard. I've not a word of fault to find. I have simply told you this to remind you that I have not forgotten past events, and to prepare you for what is to follow."

"And that is—"

"Just this, Reggy," and the gambler's face was wreathed in a sardonic smile. "I sent for you simply because I am tired of this dare-devil life of single blessedness, and I propose to get married!"

"Well, what the deuce have I to do with your marrying?" demanded Ray.

"Everything, my dear boy. To come to the point at once, I want you to furnish the bride!"

"Ah!"

"Yes, ah! I see that you grasp my meaning at last. You know, I always remembered Mrs. Ray, and it struck me that if her daughter were half as charming, she would suit my idea of a wife. So I sent you that important message with the intention of getting the girl out here, and I am pleased to say that my plan succeeded perfectly. I caught a glimpse of fair Rachel this morning, and she far surpasses my expectations, so now nothing remains but your consent, dear Reggy, to make me happy for life. What do you think of the arrangement?"

Reginald Ray had risen to his feet, and now his eyes flashed fire as he confronted the gambler.

"Is that what you have enticed us here for, Cool Carl?" he demanded.

"Exactly!"

"Then you have had your trouble for nothing; for let me tell you, once for all, my niece shall never become the wife of such a vile scoundrel as you. Now—"

"Stop! You forget that you are both wholly in my power. You have fallen into my trap like a lamb going to the slaughter-pen, and now you must do as I bid you."

"Never! I defy you!" cried the merchant, excitedly.

A cruel, scornful laugh escaped the lips of the gambler king, while his keen eye glittered like those of a rattlesnake.

"Take care, you fool!" he hissed. "You know not the true hopelessness of your situation. Rich and powerful as you may be in your native town, let me tell you that here in Canyon City it will avail you nothing. This is my kingdom; among these wild mountaineers I reign supreme. Were I to say the word you would never leave this camp alive. The morning sun would find you dangling from the nearest limb."

Reginald Ray was speechless; he could only bury his face in his hands and moan aloud. He was not slow to realize that the gambler spoke the truth; he was helplessly in Cool Carl's power.

"You comprehend the situation," went on the latter. "The game is in my hands. I have your niece, fair or foul. Consent to take me for your loving nephew, and you are at liberty to depart in peace as soon as the nuptials are completed; refuse, and you die. It is a question of life or death, and the answer lies wholly with you. Do you consent?"

"Yes," groaned the New Yorker, in despair. "Fool that I was to be lured here! Go your length, Cool Carleton. You are triumphant now, but the time will come when you will repent of your deviltry. Leave me, now! I want to be at peace."

Again Cool Carl laughed in mingled scorn and derision.

"A pretty subject you are to talk of peace and repentance," he said. "However, I'll not afflict you any longer by my angelic presence. Having other business to attend to, I'll leave you to find your way back to the hotel. Tomorrow I will pay my respects to my beautiful bride that is to be. Ta-ta!"

With a mocking courtesy, Cool Carl turned and strode away.

Reginald Ray watched his receding form with clinched fists and flashing eyes.

"Curse you, Cool Carl!" he hissed. "I'll outwit you yet. God knows I have sinned enough without surrendering this pure, innocent girl into the hands of such an unscrupulous scoundrel. For years I have endeavored to atone for my wrong-doing by doing all in my power in her behalf; and now must it come to this? Never! I'll defend her to the last drop of my blood. We must, we will escape from this trap. This very night I will fly from this cursed place—away from Cool Carl and his band of cut-throats!"

Excited and panting, quivering in every limb, Reginald Ray rushed madly from the spot; while scarcely had he disappeared when a dark form suddenly showed itself from behind the very rock where the two men had been seated.

Evidently the conversation had been overheard!

"Jiminy! Hyar's a pretty mess," squeaked the new-comer, and the voice was unmistakably that of Tommy the Kid. "I reckon that dood would like ter hear o' this conflag, fur unless I'm mightily mistaken, he thinks a powerful lot of that purty piece of caliker. But gosh! thar's the swell in limbo, an' it's lucky if he gets off with a whole skin; so, how am I to tell him? Jiminy! I must contrive a way, somehow."

Tommy the Kid lost no time in making his way to the camp, but was disappointed on arriving there to find that his friend had been liberated and turned out of town.

This made things more perplexing than before, but the bold lad was not discouraged. Without a moment's delay, he set out in quest of the missing "dood."

CHAPTER VI.

THE DANDY SPORT PLAYS BALL.

CANYON CITY was not at the height of its prosperity. Like many other towns of its class, it had seen better days. The supply of the precious dross that had once attracted thousands of prospectors to the vicinity, was rapidly growing less, and the prospect was that a few months at the furthest would find Canyon City a thing of the past.

However, it was no worse than its sister camps in that respect; throughout the entire region the ore was fast being exhausted, and as no new bonanzas were brought to light, it was but natural that the citizens should prefer to remain quietly at home, for want of a better place to go to, and wait, Micawber-like, for something to turn up.

Shut out from the outer world by frowning mountain walls, with nothing to do but drink, gamble and fight, it is not strange that the majority of the city pined for fresh amusement, and hailed with delight any means of enlightening their dull and irksome existence.

So when a pilgrim roamed in from the outer world one day, and told of the popularity of base-ball all over the land, and how thousands assembled daily to witness the brilliant play and harass the luckless umpire, the desires of the people to test the merits of the game were at once inflamed.

Here was the opportunity for which the Canyon Cityites had long been sighing. Scarcely a man who had not played ball in days of yore, and now the memories of the old-time sport came rushing back to them.

The necessary paraphernalia was procured with some difficulty, and the idea, once started, took like wildfire. Soon it was a common and somewhat amusing spectacle to see gaunt, red-shirted miners chasing the nimble ball with all the enjoyment of frolicsome schoolboys.

Other towns in the vicinity soon caught the fever, and at this period base-ball was at the height of its popularity.

It quickly became a question as to what town possessed the best ball team, and the rivalry was intense, notably between Canyon City and Silverton, a camp further up the gulch.

As each place claimed the distinction, it was deemed necessary to play a series of three games to decide the question of superiority; and also to incite the players to do their best work, a purse of one thousand dollars had been subscribed, the whole to go to the winning nine.

At this time two of the games had already

been contested. The Silvertonians opened in good style by coming to Canyon City and beating the home team after a close and exciting battle; but in the return game, the Canyon Citys, who had meanwhile developed a good pitcher, wiped out the score by shutting out their opponents.

And now, on the day following the exile of Algernon Arnold, the decisive game was to be contested. It was an occasion eagerly looked forward to by the inhabitants of both towns, for as each club had won a game, this would decide the championship.

Large sums of money were said to be wagered on the result, and when the morning of the eventful day arrived, the excitement had reached fever heat.

Those who had work to do, neglected it to see the fun, everybody was on the *qui vive*, and the streets of Canyon City were crowded.

As noon approached, excitement increased with the arrival of the Silverton nine. They were accompanied by the entire population of that enterprising burgh, comprising nearly two hundred rough-and-ready citys, all eager for fun and ready to back their favorites to their last copper. Amid great confusion, with discordant yells and tooting of horns, the Silverton contingent marched proudly into town, and mingled with the Canyon City crowd.

Preparations were immediately made to open the game.

The grounds were just outside the camp. They were spacious and remarkably level, naturally, and a little labor had served to improve their condition to a considerable extent.

To the right and left a space was roped off, for spectators, leaving the field beyond first and third base entirely clear and unobstructed.

The minutes went by slowly enough to the impatient multitude assembled there to witness the game; but, suddenly, just before the time had expired, renewed excitement was caused by the report going the rounds that Dandy Jim, the crack pitcher of the home team, had been so unlucky as to fall and break his right arm, at the very time when his presence was relied upon to help the team to victory.

At first the story was thought to be a clever ruse on the part of the Canyon Citys to influence betting; but investigation proved that the rumor was not without foundation.

Dandy Jim was, indeed, disabled; and the team seemed irretrievably crippled.

Swiftly sped the intelligence, and the result was quick to be seen.

The Canyon City men were inferior batsmen, and were relying mainly upon their battery to carry them through; now that they were crippled in what had been the strongest point, the chances for victory seemed very poor indeed, for no other man in town was competent to stand before the brawny "sluggers" from Silverton.

Knowing this, they who had put their money on the Canyon Citys made every effort to hedge; and where once the betting had been even, now odds of five to one on the men from Silverton were freely offered.

Here was a pretty state of affairs! In a neighboring shanty the disabled team had assembled, gloomy and despondent, to discuss the situation.

Seth Jones, the burly captain, was fairly beside himself. If they failed to appear on the field at the appointed time, the game would be declared forfeited to the Silvertons, nine to nothing; and to try and play without a pitcher would be sheer foolishness. Something must be done at once, for but ten minutes remained, but what?

"A million curses on our infernal luck!" howled the captain in despair.

"Somebody show me a pitcher. Me kingdom for the galoot who kin pitch a ball! Every cent in my pocket would I give to the man who could down thar Silvertons, an' pull us outen this pesky hole!"

"Then turn your pockets inside-out, pard, for I'm the chap who can do that little trick!"

Quietly the words were uttered, and the occupants of the shanty looked up to find that a new-comer had entered the room unnoticed.

"The dandy dood, by thunder!" was the amazed cry.

"Yes, it was indeed Algernon Arnold, the young sport so unceremoniously bounced from the camp but a few hours before; and he stood there as cool and affable as if such an event had never occurred.

"Gentlemen, you seem surprised to see me again so soon," remarked the young man. "I must admit I have considerable cheek to come to a place I have been invited to steer clear of;

but, the fact is, gentlemen, I heard of your predicament and resolved to return good for evil. I have come to pitch your game for you!"

The captain of the Canyon Citys eyed the speaker with a look half hopeful, half incredulous.

"Kin you pitch ball?" he demanded.

Algernon smiled mysteriously.

"Well enough to pull you through," he said, confidently. "I didn't spend four years at Harvard for nothing."

"An' will ye do it?"

"Yes, on one condition. If I win the game, I am to have the freedom of the town as long as I see fit to remain; if I lose, I am to be permitted to depart again unmolested."

"Agreed!" cried Jones, heartily. "An' what's more, ef you win you shall hev half o' the thousan' dollars, eh, boys?"

"Ay; an' ther hull ov it if he wants," came the response in chorus. "Anything ter beat them durn skunks from up the gulch."

"Then it is a bargain," exclaimed Algernon, eagerly. "Lead on, boys, and we'll show these chumps how to play ball according to rule."

The demoralized team rallied around the Dandy Sport admiringly; there was something in the cool and confident manner of the Eastern youth that inspired them with fresh courage.

"Come on, boys! No time to lose! Give us one tiger for ther dandy dude, an' here's hopin' we'll wallop the blatherskites out yonder. Whoop!"

There was a wild yell that nearly raised the roof, and then the nine men rushed out upon the field amid the shouts of the excited mob.

Just in time, for the umpire stood, watch in hand, with the captain of the Silvertons by his side.

Their appearance was the signal for an outburst of applause from the citizens, for but few had supposed the team would venture upon the field.

Captain Jones won the toss, and sent his men to the field; and as they moved out, resplendent in their brilliant uniforms, every neck was craned to see whom they would present as pitcher.

With the utmost nonchalance, Algernon Arnold stalked leisurely into the diamond; his dandified attire in marked contrast with that of his fellows, made him conspicuous to every one, and instantly there went up from both factions a mighty yell of derision.

The idea that the dude could play ball never once occurred to the spectators, and while the friends of the home club lustily howled their disappointment, the crowd from Silverton regarded the thing as a huge joke, and yelled delightedly in anticipation of the picnic they felt sure would follow.

But the demonstrations of the mob had no apparent effect upon the dude in the box. He leisurely proceeded to divest himself of his outer garments, pitched them upon the grass in a heap, rolled up his sleeves, then received the new ball from the umpire and faced the first batsman with the utmost sang froid.

"High ball!—Play!" called the umpire, and then silence, deep and unbroken, descended upon the scene!

CHAPTER VII. A FAMOUS VICTORY.

It was a picturesque scene that the summer sun looked down upon that eventful afternoon. There was the little valley, flanked on every side by rugged mountains; there, in the center, the Canyon City, stood like so many expectant statues, their bright costumes in gay contrasts with the emerald field; while on both sides looked down a sea of eager faces, intently watching every movement. Taken all in all, it was a spectacle long to be remembered.

"Play ball!"

As this command left the lips of the umpire, the Dandy Sport twirled the ball carelessly for a moment, then pirouetted gracefully on one foot, hopped up like a jack-in-a-box, and went through a variety of other gymnastical movements; finally, after the crowd was howling derisively at his antics, sending the sphere in toward the plate like a cannon-shot.

"One strike!" cried the umpire, as the ball, after darting straight at the batsman, suddenly shot out directly over the plate into the waiting hands of the catcher.

The slugger looked puzzled, but he gripped his club with the determination to hit the ball "right on the nose," and send it on a voyage of discovery to the heavenly regions.

Again the ball came whizzing from the Dandy's hand, this time coming just where he wanted it. But when the Silvertonian struck

viciously at the flying sphere, it was only to find that it had dodged nimbly underneath his bat.

"Two strikes!" and the shout of the audience decreased, as they began to grow interested.

The next ball was so slow that it seemed poised in the air, and the slugger banged at it so hard that it went spinning round and round; but the sphere managed to evade the stick, and the umpire said:

"Three strikes!"

One man was out and only three balls pitched. Was it possible that the dude could play ball, or was it simply luck? Which ever it might be, the result was satisfactory enough.

The second man at the bat came to time smiling, but he pounded the air three times and sat down in disgust.

The next walked to the plate determined to do something, but he had holes in his bat, and speedily shared the fate of his predecessors.

Three men struck out in succession? The spectators could hardly believe the evidence of their eyes. But when they realized that the despised swell had performed this remarkable feat, the Canyon Cityites fairly stood up on their toes and howled enthusiastically.

Still, one inning did not constitute a game, and the dude might not be able to keep up his wonderful work. So when the home team, after counting nothing, went to the field again, silence once more brooded o'er the scene.

But Algernon Arnold proved equal to the emergency. Standing in his box, the very personification of ease and coolness, he mowed down the heavy hitters of the Silverton team like so many ninepins.

It was wonderful what control the youth possessed over the leathery sphere; he seemed to be able to send it just wherever he willed. The ball shot in and out, up and down; now skimming along the ground, then dancing tantalizingly before their faces; first a deceptive slow drop that scarcely seemed to move at all, next a terrific in-shoot that struck the catcher's hands with a sound like a rifle-shot. Dancing zig-zag through the air, it seemed to twine itself all over and around the bat, mocking to scorn the frantic efforts of the men from Silverton.

As the game progressed, and the dandy sport gave no signs of weakening, it became plain to the lookers-on that the heavy hitters of the visiting team were completely at his mercy.

The feelings of the Canyon Cityites can better be imagined than described. Their joy knew no bounds when they beheld their foes going down like chaff in the whirlwind before the magical delivery of the wizard pitcher and the air fairly rung with their exultant cries.

Eight innings were quickly played, and strange to relate, neither club had scored.

For the Silvertons, only twenty-four men had gone to the bat, not one of them reaching first base. Of these, four had sent up easy flies, two had died at first, while the remainder had fallen victims to the wiles of the Dandy Sport.

On the other side, the Canyon Citys hit the ball frequently, but a combination of bad luck and poor judgment in base-running prevented them from scoring.

In the last inning, however, things grew more exciting. The Dandy's catcher was a plucky fellow, but the former's hot ones had proved too much for him, and he was in no condition to hold them. So when, after two of the Silvertons had retired, the third man banded away at the atmosphere three times, the catcher could not stop the ball, which went through his fingers and down the field like a streak. Ere it could be recovered, the man had made the circuit of the bases and scored the first tally of the game.

The last man was quickly put out, and then the Canyon Citys came in for the last time with the score one to nothing against them.

Silverton stock had advanced, and her backers were fast recovering their good spirits, but the sympathizers with the home team looked anxious and doubtful.

The first man hit the ball to the in-field and died at first; the Silvertonians howled. The next sent up a fly that was easily gobbled, and then they roared. The third man managed to get his base on a scratch hit, and then it was Canyon City's turn to shout, but very little enthusiasm attended the effort.

With two out and a man on first base, and one run needed to tie and two to win, the home team's chances for victory were poor indeed; as Algernon Arnold, whose turn was next, picked up his bat, a deathlike silence fell upon the scene.

The dandy pitcher took his position, and faced the opposing twirler with an air of determination.

Breathlessly the crowd awaited the result.

"One strike!" and the crowd groaned.

"Two strikes!"

The Silverton contingent howled in derision.

Then at the last moment, when every chance seemed lost, the young sport got the ball just where he wanted it.

"Crack!" went the supple willow, and then the vast multitude were electrified to see the leathern sphere rise majestically into the air and soar far over the head of the center fielder.

For a moment the Canyon Cityites could scarcely believe the evidence of their own eyes; but when Arnold was seen flying around the bases like a streak of lightning, they came to the conclusion that it was no tantalizing dream, but a most pleasing reality.

Then such a yell went up from hundreds of bronzed throats that fairly shook the foundations of the mighty hills.

The player who had been at first base came darting home with the tying run, while the daring young Easterner, by wonderful running, reached third just as the Silverton outfielder recovered the ball and sent it in straight as an arrow.

Not for an instant faltering, Algernon kept on like a flash toward the home plate, but quick as he was, the sphere, accurately thrown was even swifter, and settled in the catcher's hands while he was yet a dozen feet away from the coveted goal.

A wail of despair arose from the Canyon Cityites. It looked a sure "out," the run was needlessly thrown away, and their once buoyant spirits fell to zero as if by magic.

But lo! what followed fairly paralyzed them with astonishment.

On like a thunderbolt came the audacious runner, never for an instant checking his speed; then, just as the exultant catcher reached out to touch him with the ball, Arnold made a mighty leap into the air and went clear over the head of the astonished backstop!

Such a trick had never before been seen, or even dreamed of, by the primitive ball-tossers of the mines; and the crowd gave way to their feelings in a manner that could not fail to prove their appreciation of the feat.

But at this exciting moment, even as Algernon Arnold poised for an instant in mid-air, the sharp report of a revolver rung out upon the air; and with a cry of pain, the dashing pitcher sunk in a quivering heap upon the ground, directly over the coveted home base.

The goal was reached; the winning run was scored, and the Canyon Citys held the proud title of champions; but the young sport, whose wonderful skill and daring had won the game, lay pale and motionless upon the earth!

In a moment confusion reigned supreme, as hundreds of excited citizens looked for the man who had fired the dastardly shot. In vain! If any one had seen the shot fired, he kept the knowledge to himself, and the assassin made good his escape.

Amid the confusion, while crowds surged fiercely in every direction, a dozen strong arms lifted Algernon Arnold from the ground.

As they did so, the sport opened his eyes and looked bewilderedly around; and instantly a ringing cheer proclaimed the fact that the young man was yet in the land of the living.

Algernon's face was deathly pale, and blood trickled from his temple; but he stood upon his feet and waved off the willing hands outstretched to assist him.

"I'm all right, gentlemen," he assured them, with a faint smile. "The intentions of that chap, whoever he is, were good enough, but he didn't calculate correctly. The bullet simply grazed the skin, taking a lock of my hair to remember me by. But, tell me, am I out or safe? Is the game ours?"

"You betcher last copper it is, an' so's ther boodle," roared the exhilarated captain of the Canyon City Mine. "Boys, hyar's the feller that pulled us through! Three cheers for ther dandy dude!"

Amid lusty shouts from hundreds of throats, swelling and blending into a continuous roar that fairly made the mountains quake, the Dandy Sport was seized and borne in triumph through the town, from whence, but a few hours before, he had been driven—an exile; while the surging populace, wild with joy, hastened to honor the youth whose prowess had carried them to victory!

CHAPTER VIII.

TRAPPED.

WHEN Reginald Ray, the wealthy New York merchant, left the scene of his unpleasant inter-

view with Cool Carl, he made all possible haste to return to the hotel.

Wicked as the man had been in the past, he fairly worshiped the fair girl whom he had carefully brought up from an infant, and had loaded her with everything wealth could procure; and now should he give her into the hands of such an unscrupulous scoundrel as the gambler king?

Never! Before such a thing should happen, he would slay her with his own hand!

Reginald Ray cursed his folly in thus placing himself in the net of his former pard; but there he was, and it was of no use regretting his lack of wit and foresight, when he suffered himself to be fooled in such an artful manner.

But love for his niece and anxiety for her safety served to arouse the lion within him, and Reginald Ray was resolved to make a desperate attempt to escape from Canyon City.

Realizing that prompt and energetic action alone could save them, he hurried to the hotel and stole noiselessly to the apartment where Rachel was peacefully sleeping.

A light tap at the door was sufficient to arouse her, and she hastened to admit her uncle.

"Rachel," whispered Reginald, impressively, "we must leave this place! Come, make haste, and prepare to accompany me. The sooner we are away from this infernal town the better it will be for us both."

His face was ashy pale, while his eyes glittered in excitement, and the awakened girl stared at him in mingled alarm and bewilderment.

"Why, Uncle Reginald, what do you mean?" she inquired. "What has happened?"

"This is no time for explanations, my child. You shall know everything in good time. Sufficient for the present to tell you that we must leave Canyon City at once. Make haste!"

Rachel wisely asked no more, but hurried to do her uncle's bidding. She had removed only her outer garments upon retiring, so it took but a moment for her to make ready.

"Now come, Rachel; and remember, not the slightest noise! We must be seen or heard by no one."

Stealthily they stole out of the room, down the stairs, and, noiselessly opening the door, passed out into the street.

So far their movements had apparently been unobserved. The remaining inmates of the "Pick and Shovel" were doubtless fast asleep, and the house was wrapped in gloom.

In the distance shone the lights of the Miners' Home, and the excited hum of many voices told the fugitives that the men of Canyon City were indulging in their usual night's entertainment.

With the tiny hand of his niece clasped tightly within his own, Reginald Ray made his way through the camp. Knowledge of his perilous position warned him of the necessity of caution, and the New Yorker exercised his judgment with such good effect that they soon reached the outskirts of the town without encountering a single person.

When the entrance to Spirit Canyon was reached, Reginald breathed more freely, but he was not deluded enough to think that he was then safe. Far from it!

The nearest camp was fully a dozen miles away, and if they succeeded in reaching it, Ray hoped to find security from Cool Carl and his cut-throats. But it was a long and tiresome journey, under the most favorable circumstances, and with the fear of pursuit and capture uppermost in his mind, small wonder that the fugitive almost despaired of reaching a place of security.

Rachel Ray, roused from peaceful slumber to a hasty flight into the mountains, was both surprised and alarmed by the, to her, incomprehensible actions of her uncle. She perceived from his strange and half-crazed manner, that something terrible had happened, but wisely refrained from troubling him with needless questions, and trudged bravely along by her relative's side.

Desperate from anxiety to escape from the clutches of Cool Carl, the man from New York strode nervously down the rugged trail, half-leading, half-dragging his terrified niece.

On, on—in desperate haste, until, in a remarkably short time, they had reached the dangerous vicinity of Satan's Kettle, and placed fully two miles between them and the roughs of Canyon City.

It was after the hour of midnight, and darkness, deep and impenetrable, invaded the gloomy precincts of the canyon. Without, the moon was shining brightly; but her radiant beams

never penetrated to the depths of this dismal recess in the mountains.

Fully aware of their hazardous surroundings, the fugitives were compelled to use more caution in their movements, lest a chance misstep should precipitate them into the frightful abyss beside the trail.

"Halt!"

The stern command rung out with startling distinctness upon the silent air.

Convulsively clutching each other's hands, the startled fugitives stood in their tracks as if turned to stone. Could it be that their enemies had observed their flight, and, pursuing, were now close upon them? The thought caused Ray's heart to sink within him.

But, he reasoned, it was impossible for the pursuers to have passed them; and, as the sound emanated from a point directly ahead, it was improbable that the challenger was one of Cool Carl's party.

Trembling with suppressed excitement, the two listened for a repetition of the command. A minute passed, but no further sound was heard. This fact reassured Reginald Ray.

"Bah! We are getting nervous, child," he whispered, hoarsely. "The sound we heard was doubtless the wind moaning through the canyon! Come! Let us hasten on."

Courageously he advanced a step, but as he did so, the imperative challenge rung out again, sharper and sterner than before.

Suddenly, as if by magic, a dozen lights flashed brightly before their eyes, making the canyon light as day. By the flaring torch-light, the startled fugitives were enabled to see a group of stalwart men, grim and motionless as figures of stone, standing in the trail, a dozen yards away. Several of the foremost held leveled revolvers, the muzzles of which were threateningly brought to bear upon the luckless travelers.

With mingled disgust and trepidation, Reginald looked upon this formidable array. His first idea was to precipitate flight, but, turning for this purpose, he was chagrined to behold a line of men drawn up across the trail in the rear.

The fugitives were completely surrounded; so the New-Yorker, seeing the utter hopelessness of the situation, faced the music with what little calmness he could muster.

"Well, gentlemen, we have obeyed your mandate," Reginald Ray said promptly. "Be so kind as to make known your pleasure with us. We are peaceful travelers, and I fail to see why we are thus molested."

As the merchant finished speaking, a man separated himself from the group, and sauntered coolly up to the fugitives, leisurely puffing at a choice cigar.

It was no other than Cool Carl, and Reginald Ray uttered a cry of despair as he recognized the "boss" of Canyon City.

All for naught had been his desperate efforts to escape. Fool-like, he had believed their departure was unnoticed, only to have the dream of security rudely dispelled, and find himself and Rachel once more in the power of their arch-enemy.

Cool Carl's tigrish face wore the look of a fiend, as he paused with arms akimbo, and leisurely surveyed the perspiring features of his old-time comrade.

"Why, it's my old friend Ray, or I'm a Chinaman!" ejaculated the gambler in mocking surprise. "Why, Reggy, dear boy, what brings you here at this hour of the night, when honest people should be wrapped in peaceful dreams? Out for a moonlight stroll, eh? Well, it's the unexpected that always happens, they say, and I assure you this is a most pleasant surprise. And there is Miss Ray, too! I declare, how charming she is looking!"

Cool Carl ended his sarcastic greeting with an elaborate bow, of which Rachel was the intended recipient, but the frightened girl recoiled from the gambler, and clung closer to her uncle's side.

The scoundrel's eyes flashed fire, as he noted Rachel's aversion, but otherwise he gave no sign that he observed it.

"Give me your hand, Reggy, old boy!" he continued, glibly. "What? Are you not glad to see me?"

For Reginald Ray had shrunk from his foe, as from the touch of the venomous rattlesnake, and his only response was a muttered curse.

Cool Carl laughed sardonically.

"It galls you, don't it, Reggy, to see how thoroughly I have you in my power? Ha, ha! Were you fool enough to think I would neglect to keep a watch on your movements? Why, you fool! sharp eyes were on you from the moment

you left the Pick and Shovel. We could have nabbed you ere you went a hundred yards; but I preferred to postpone the surprise, and so let you run away with the idea that you were performing a very clever trick. You didn't expect to find me here, eh, Reggy?"

Ray defiantly shook his fist in the tormentor's face, and swore roundly in uncontrollable passion.

"Curse you, for a merciless scoundrel!" he cried. "Curse me for the idiot I was in coming here! But now that I am in your power, Cool Carl, understand, once for all, that I defy you and your villainous gang. So do your worst!"

The boss of Canyon City contemplated his victim with evident enjoyment.

"Easy, Reggy!" he admonished, carelessly throwing away his half-burned weed. "I pray you, don't work yourself into a fit over the matter. 'Keep cool and take things easy,' is our motto here in the untamed West; and you better accept your fate as a matter of course."

"It was very ungentlemanly of you, Reggy, to thus desert an old friend's hospitality, and steal off like a thief in the night, without as much as saying good-by. You might at least have waited until morning, and departed in the coach, as would better befit a man of your exalted station. However, I could not bear to lose you so soon, and therefore have taken the trouble to overhaul you. I must insist that you accept my hospitality for a time, that I may have an opportunity to become better acquainted with your lovely niece, Miss Rachel."

"But enough of this useless palaver! I cannot delay any longer, as I have important business to attend to in town; so I am compelled to tear myself away. My men will conduct you to our mountain retreat, where you will, I assure you, receive the best of treatment. To-morrow I will come to visit you, and make arrangements for the nuptials. Until then, adieu!"

Another mocking courtesy, and the king of Canyon City receded in the darkness, accompanied by a portion of his men.

The remainder, numbering nearly half a score gathered about the captives. They had doubtless received instructions beforehand, for no time was lost in starting. Surrounded by these brawny cut-throats, each and every one armed to the teeth, there was no alternative for the two unfortunates but to submit to the will of their captors.

As the party moved slowly up the canyon, a person who had been crouching in the shadows, flattened himself against the rocky wall to escape collision, breathing more freely as the last man went by, actually brushing the skulker's garments as he passed.

"Jee-whack! That was a narrow squeak, I'll allow," remarked the eavesdropper, coming out into the trail; and the new-comer's voice testified that Tommy the Kid was again on deck.

Leaning against a convenient bowlder, the mountain boy mentally discussed the situation.

"Pears to me I was born to be a detective," he soliloquized. "Twice since dark hev I happened round jest in time to hear somethin' interesting. I cum out here lookin' for the Dandy Sport, but now I'm in a quand'ry. Here's these two unfortunates whom Cool Carl hev got his bread-hooks on, an' which same I oughter foller, an' try to get 'em out of their fix. Shall I hunt up the dood, an' get him to help me; or, had I better sail in to rescue 'em on my own hook?"

"I hev it! I'll foller the gang, locate the whereabouts of their prisoners; then hunt up the sport, an' together we will work to beat Cool Carl out of his game. Here goes!"

With the intrepid mountain lad, to think was to act; and, his course fully decided upon, Tommy the Kid started resolutely after Cool Carl's cut-throats.

CHAPTER IX.

THE "CITS" CELEBRATE.

It was the night following the remarkable base-ball match between the Silverton and Canyon City clubs, in which the latter, thanks to the timely assistance of Algernon Arnold, came off first best; and the friends and backers of the victorious team were making extensive preparations for celebrating the event in a manner befitting so enterprising a burg.

The setting sun that night looked down upon a scene of unusual interest; never before in the varied history of Canyon City had that rough-and-ready town witnessed so wild and picturesque a spectacle.

The entire population was on the move; for who could keep quiet on this, an occasion for universal jubilee? Pandemonium seemed let loose within the limits of the usually peaceful

mining-camp. Hundreds of joyous natives, half-crazy with delight, crowded and jostled one another in the street, whooping and yelling at the top of their lungs, each and every man striving to make more noise than his neighbors.

Meantime, the Silverton contingent had hastened to make themselves scarce. When the game was over, the Canyon Cityites, eager to congratulate their victorious players, had entirely ignored the presence of their rivals from down the gulch; and now, when the excitement had in a measure abated, it was a noticeable fact that not a Silvertonian was to be seen in camp.

Sore from defeat, and unable to face the derisive taunts of their triumphant opponents, the Silverton party had, doubtless, gathered up their weary sluggers, and departed for home, there to seek solace for their lost wealth and glory.

However, their disappearance failed to cause the victors much concern. Canyon City held the title of "champion," clear and indisputable, and in addition, gloried in the possession of thousands of dollars, for the Silvertonians had backed their club heavily, and the result left them empty-pocketed.

Realizing that the occasion demanded more than ordinary demonstration, the worthy citizens at once set about, with what little material was available, to celebrate the glorious victory in a style of which Canyon City might be proud.

It was decided to commence with a mighty bonfire, to be followed by a triumphant procession, in which every one might participate. Immediately a party set to work collecting material for the fire, and by nightfall a vast pile of inflammable rubbish had been accumulated.

A tumble-down shanty, long since abandoned, was selected for the nucleus of the gigantic blaze; and as soon as darkness had fairly settled over the valley, the pile was fired amid great enthusiasm.

As quickly as possible followed the procession, and a more ludicrous array never astonished the eyes of mortal man.

First came the "band," if indeed it deserved the dignity of that appellation, hastily improvised from the scanty material available. A battered trumpet, relic of Mexican war days; a squeaky fiddle, from some far away Eastern home; an impromptu drum corps, composed of a big copper kettle, together with tin pans innumerable—this comprised the music; and what the musicians lacked in skill and harmony, they fully made up in enthusiasm.

Next came a phalanx of torch-bearers, acting as body-guard for the members of the Canyon City Base-ball Club, who marched proudly along, the cynosure of hundreds of admiring eyes.

The central figure of the procession was Algernon Arnold, whose wonderful pitching had won the day. Mounted upon the shoulders of two of the victorious team, he was borne proudly along, greeted with vociferous cheers at every step. The young Easterner would fain have shrunk from so conspicuous a position, but the crowd willed it so, and Arnold good-naturedly acquiesced.

Following the players came a motley array of men, comprising most of the town's population, jostling and crowding each other with little regard for order. Many of them carried torches; and all, unable to do their feelings justice by mere strength of lungs, fired volley after volley into the vacant air.

Surely such a novel sight was never seen in Canyon City as this nondescript assembly of parading cits, as up and down they marched, making the night hideous with their noise.

After a time, when pounds of powder and lead had been wasted, and every man shouted himself hoarse, the enthusiastic crowd broke ranks, only to assemble again around the blazing bonfire.

A mammoth bar had been improvised in the open air, the stock in trade of which was supplied from the various saloons. The liquor dealers had been upon the winning side of the game, and could afford to be generous to everybody in general. Consequently, fiery tangle-foot was dispensed free to whomsoever thirsted.

Under these circumstances, it would be needless to state that the bar was well patronized. The "free liquor" idea caught on so readily that soon everybody was in a state of unusual exhilaration.

Near the bonfire, a rudely-constructed platform was erected; while the space around it was roped off to keep back the crowd. Into this opening the victorious players were escorted.

When every one had congregated near the spot, "a pilgrim" approached the platform,

and climbed gingerly to its giddy summit. The new-comer was one of Canyon City's intelligent citizens, and quite an important character in his way. He signed himself as Timothy Tenny-fellow, but the practical cits, having no time to waste in pronouncing such long-drawn cognomens, referred to him familiarly as Tonguey Tim.

Timothy was unquestionably a fellow of considerable genius, whom untoward circumstances had, as he himself expressed it, doomed to "blush unseen, and waste his sweetness on the desert air;" and from his well-known "gift of gab," he was always in great demand upon occasions like the present.

The orator balanced himself with no little difficulty, for even he had not been able to withstand the temptation of the free bar; and with a majestic wave of the hand, he motioned the noisy crowd to silence.

"Friends an' feller-citizens, ladies, gents an' little children," he commenced grandiloquently, "it gives me unutterable pleasure in thus being permitted to address you upon this long-to-be-remembered occasion. Of course it is entirely superficial for me to tell you why we are celebrating this evening; the occurrences of to-day are, I trust, already fixed indelibly upon your memories. A few hours ago, the fiery, untamed rabble of Silverton invaded our peaceful burg, with the boasted determination of wiping the earth with our poor upstarts, who dared dispute with them the proud title of champion; now they have gathered up their weary sluggers, and are sadly wending their homeward way, with the feelings of men who have bet their ducats not wisely but too well.

"Feller-cits, the tug-of-war is over! The mighty struggle, so long looked forward to, has resulted in favor of Canyon City. Victory perches upon our banners! As Bob Ingersoll once said to me, 'Veni, vidi, vici!' which, being interpreted, means we have met the big-mouthed Silvertons, an' licked 'em clean out of their muddy boots.

"Kind friends, I fear the present occasion is too momentous for my feeble tongue to do it justice. I am completely overcome with patriotic emotion. With your kind permission I will pause to take something."

A glass of "something" was promptly handed up to the silver-tongued orator, who, being thus revived, was enabled to proceed.

"It was, indeed, a famous victory, gents, and in the midst of our jubilee, we mustn't forget the brave fellows whose prowess won us fame and fortune. They did their work nobly, each and every one of them; yet, in spite of this, the fact remains that our success was due mainly to the efforts of a stranger—a man to whom our relations were antagonistic.

"You all know, gents, how things were when the Silvertonians arrived. Our crack pitcher was disabled, and without him the balance of the team were demoralized. Disaster seemed inevitable! In this dire extremity who should appear upon the scene but the man whom, but a short time before, we had driven, an exile, from the camp, not for any harm he had done us, but simply because popular sentiment was against him. Unmindful of this, he magnanimously offered his services; and with what result?

"We laughed and jeered at first at the spindle-skanked dude, but our feelings underwent a complete transformation when he settled down to work. In open-mouthed amazement, we watched him mow down the Silverton sluggers like chaff before the wind. To us inexperienced novices, his playing was a revelation in the base-ballistic art. We have read of the doings of smiling Micky Welch, of Radburne, Clarkson, and tricky Jacky Flynn; but beside the record of our champion, their vaunted achievements pale into insignificance. To be sure, he was no \$10,000 man, yet Kelly, himself, couldn't have got there to better advantage. Cits of Canyon City, I hope you all will atone for your previous discourtesy, by honoring the Dandy Sport who condescended to help us out of a very small hole; and now I have the honor of publicly presenting him to you. Behold, gents, the marvel of the nineteenth century, whose wonderful work with the sphere entitles him to be known among us as Wizard Arm the Prince of Pitchers!"

A sweeping flourish terminated the long-winded orator's flow of eloquence; but, alas for Tonguey Tim, whose legs were by no means steady, the motion was disastrous, for he lost his equilibrium, clutched wildly at the empty air, then went headlong into the midst of the crowd below.

A roar of laughter greeted the orator's mis-

hap, mingled with loud cries for the dandy pitcher; and Algernon Arnold, now the hero of the hour, reluctantly ascended the platform. His appearance was the signal for a loud burst of applause.

"Gentlemen, I thank you for this demonstration," said the young Easterner, feelingly. "I am glad to know that my efforts are appreciated, and that whatever ill feelings may have existed between us are now wiped away. Not being possessed of the eloquence of our silver-throated friend there, I must excuse myself, hoping that Canyon City will continue to prosper, and that her base ball team will always be at the top, as it has been to-day!"

As Arnold gracefully retired, there arose rounds of applause that made the hills resound; then—

Suddenly there came a chorus of shrill, unearthly yells, mingling with the trampling of countless hoofs, the combined sounds of which drowned the lusty shouts of the crowd round the bonfire; as a dark body of horsemen dashed swiftly across the lighted space, and plunged like a cyclone into the startled assembly.

Straight into the crowd they rode, the steel-shod hoofs of their steeds beating down the bewildered men of Canyon City, who, panic-stricken, scattered like sheep before the unexpected onset.

For a moment the air resounded with wild yells and rapidly-exploding firearms; then the mysterious assailants cleared themselves of the *melee*, and vanished as swiftly as they came.

And when the Canyon Cityites recovered from their amazement sufficiently to look for their injured comrades, it was found that Algernon Arnold had also disappeared. Not a trace of the Dandy Sport was to be seen.

CHAPTER X.

TOMMY THE KID COMES TO GRIEF.

TOMMY THE KID was fully determined to do his utmost to assist Reginald Ray and niece in their dire extremity, and to do this, the first thing essential was to follow Cool Carl's satellites, and learn where they took the unfortunate prisoners.

Like a shadow he glided in pursuit of the receding party, now some distance away. He could locate their position by the torches that gleamed like stars in the darkness beyond; and which, while lighting the perilous way of the Canyon Cityites, served also as a guide to the sleuth in the rear.

Prudence warned the boy tracker not to venture too near; so when he had reached a position scarcely a dozen yards from the rearmost man, Tommy checked himself considerably, and proceeded with the utmost caution.

Secure in the impenetrable darkness, the youth had little fear of discovery, lest some unforeseen circumstance should betray him; but, nevertheless, he exercised great care and deliberation in his every movement. A single misstep might be sufficient to make his presence known.

Hanging on the trail of the cut-throats with all the tact and patience of an Indian scout, Tommy the Kid kept his eyes upon the wavering line of tell-tale torchlights.

Suddenly, as if by magic, each light simultaneously disappeared!

Tommy the Kid stopped instantly, every sense on the alert. Could it be the gambler's men had discovered they were followed? Although he listened attentively, not a sound reached his eager eyes.

After waiting several moments, the young tracker became convinced that the party were not in the trail; and he was equally sure that they had not advanced a step from the spot where the torches were extinguished, else he would certainly have heard their footsteps. Yet, the fact remained that Cool Carl's men had miraculously disappeared—somewhere!

Tommy the Kid was nonplused; and he vigorously scratched his head, as if the procession would evolve an idea to relieve his perplexity.

"This beats ther Dutch," he muttered. "It's a reg'lar case of 'now ye see it, an' now ye don't.' Either them ga'oots hev all tumbled inter Satan's Kettle, or they've tuk a notion ter walk straight through this mountain wall. Ah!"

Improbable as either suggestion might seem, the latter idea sent a gleam of enlightenment into the fertile brain of the young sleuth. Promptly advancing, he closely scrutinized the somber face of the gigantic mass of rock that walled in one side of Spirit Canyon.

It was an apparently solid mass of stone, its monotonous, dull-gray appearance being relieved, here and there, by masses of hardy vines

that, having gained a precarious foothold in the numerous crevices, now climbed and clung to the rugged surface of the mountain wall.

An inward impulse urged Tommy the Kid to poke inquisitively among these vines; and after a brief search, his perseverance was rewarded by success.

For, lo! the boy's hands encountered a fissure in the apparently unbroken wall—an opening amply large enough to admit the body of a man, and through which, without doubt, Cool Carl's gang had disappeared with their prisoners.

Here, at last, was a solution to the mystery; and Tommy the Kid viewed the result of his sagacity with a complacent chuckle.

However, the young trailer did not waste any valuable time in marveling at his strange discovery. His mission was to find and rescue the prisoners, and without hesitation, the bold youth advanced into the secret passage.

The tunnel was scarcely wide enough for a man to pass comfortably, and so low vaulted that a person must needs stoop slightly while walking; which inconveniences served to make progress exceedingly difficult. The floor of the passage was rough and irregular, and sloped gradually, which fact led the explorer to believe that he was descending into the very bowels of the mountain.

Tommy the Kid advanced slowly and noiselessly, for he felt it was essential to exercise the utmost caution. He proceeded in this way for perhaps five minutes, though to him the time seemed much longer.

Suddenly a bright light, gleaming in the distance, told the end of the passage was near at hand.

Dropping upon his hands and knees, the sleuth crept stealthily over the rocky floor. Coarse words and laughter came floating to his ears, and told him that the gang was close at hand. Inch by inch, the lad advanced, until at last he reached a position where he could look out into the lighted space.

It was a stirring scene he looked upon. What seemed to be an extensive underground chamber was dimly illuminated by a number of torches, thrust into niches in the walls, which flared and flickered, giving unto everything a weird and ghostly aspect.

Near the center of the cavern, Cool Carl's satellites, five in number, had thrown themselves carelessly upon the rocky floor. Their only duty being to guard two helpless prisoners, a task by no means arduous, these fellows were proceeding to make the most of their leisure. A greasy pack of cards was being deftly manipulated, while a suspicious-looking black bottle traveled incessantly around the circle, and helped to make their position endurable.

In a dim corner of the chamber, Tommy the Kid could barely distinguish the forms of the two prisoners.

Reginald Ray was lying upon the floor, securely bound, while Rachel crouched sobbing by her uncle's side.

At sight of the poor girl in distress, the spy in the tunnel could hardly suppress his indignation. His chivalrous nature prompted him to hurl himself upon the ruffians tooth and nail; but sober afterthought speedily banished this rash impulse, and prevented so foolhardy a movement.

Secure from observation, the young trailer crouched in the friendly shadows of the passage, and calmly contemplated the situation. He had ferreted out Cool Carl's secret rendezvous; it now remained for him to rescue the Rays from the gambler's clutches—a task by no means easy of accomplishment.

Had he known the whereabouts of Algernon Arnold, the boy would have immediately called him to his assistance; but he was by no means certain of finding the Dandy Sport. Tommy the Kid boldly resolved to attempt a rescue, alone and unaided.

It was an undertaking of such magnitude that most men would have shrunk back appalled, but the young trailer was undaunted. Born and bred among the rough-and-ready men of the mines, Tommy the Kid knew not the meaning of fear.

The youth's plan was to first reach the side of Reginald Ray, and release him from his bonds. Two heads were better than one, he reasoned, even if one belonged to a tenderfoot.

Tommy intently regarded the group of ruffians, who were devoting their entire attention to the game—and the bottle, utterly unconscious of the proximity of a spy. The frequent quantities of liquor imbibed by the players, was beginning to take effect, for they grew more excited and quarrelsome as the time wore away.

Five minutes passed, and the neglected torches

burned low; the flickering lights glowed more feebly, while the fantastic shadows gradually deepened. The watcher observed this fact with pleasure; for the darker the cave, the less difficult his seemingly impossible task.

After waiting for some minutes in a state of indecision, Tommy the Kid now resolved to act without further delay. Seizing a favorable opportunity, he moved courageously forward.

"Fortune favors the bold," and the daring spy was lucky enough to find the fickle dame in good humor.

Noiselessly gliding from the entrance to the tunnel, the sleuth flitted over the rocky floor like a phantom, seeming a part of the shadowy wall itself.

So engrossed were the five ruffians in their occupation, that they failed to observe the audacious movement.

For a moment, Tommy the Kid hugged the wall, scarcely believing he had escaped discovery. Then emboldened by success, he rose to his feet and made another movement in the direction of the captives.

But alas! for Tommy. In the semi-darkness, he failed to observe that an empty keg lay directly in his way, and his first knowledge of the obstacle was when his foot struck heavily against it.

With a sharp cry of dismay, the spy leaped quickly to one side, then slipped, and landed unceremoniously in the very midst of the startled group of card-players.

Five shouts of astonishment escaped the lips of Cool Carl's subordinates, and blended into one discordant howl, as men, cards and bottles flew in all directions. For a moment there was the ludicrous spectacle of bodies, arms and legs tossing in wild confusion.

Tommy the Kid was the first to recover himself; and he scrambled hurriedly to his feet, just in time to escape the brawny arms outstretched to seize him.

The youth darted toward the opening, bent on immediate retreat, for he saw the foolhardiness of fighting against such fearful odds. But he was not to escape so easily! Cool Carl's men were between him and the passage, effectually cutting off his retreat.

For an instant the lad stood irresolute. The brains of the ruffians were not so muddled as to prevent them from comprehending how matters stood, and now they made a concerted attack upon the audacious intruder.

Tommy the Kid, dismayed, retreated to the wall. He still possessed the pistol given him by Algernon Arnold, and as he sprang backward, he drew the weapon and fired point-blank at his assailants.

The foremost ruffian threw up his arms and fell heavily to the floor. His comrades kept on.

Determined to fight to the last, Tommy reached the opposite wall, only to find himself at the opening of a second tunnel. Hastily recocking his weapon, the boy retreated into the passage, where he paused, and with ready pistol awaited the advance of his enemies.

The latter had come to an abrupt halt; the fate of their comrade had taught them caution.

Crouching in the gloomy tunnel, Tommy the Kid watched and waited, his heart throbbing with excitement.

He could hear the sound of voices in eager consultation, followed soon after by a rumbling sound, as of a heavy object being moved.

Then suddenly the light at the mouth of the passage disappeared. Everything was in darkness.

Tommy the Kid was at a loss to understand the meaning of this. Cautiously he advanced, anxious to learn the movements of his foes—advanced until his outstretched hand touched a wall of stone, that, stretching across the entrance to the tunnel, effectually blocked further progress.

Then it was that the luckless lad comprehended the fiendish ingenuity of his enemies, and knew that he was a helpless prisoner—entombed alive in the heart of the mountain!

CHAPTER XI.

SILVERTON'S VENGEANCE.

It was an abrupt and unexpected termination to Canyon City's merrymaking, when half a hundred unknown horsemen swept down upon the scene like an avalanche, charging among the startled citizens with a fury that was irresistible.

Still standing upon the extemporized platform, Algernon Arnold shared the astonishment of his

friends. Before he could make a movement to descend from his risky position, the assailants were upon them.

Dashing swiftly across the lighted space, the horsemen shaped their course, straight as an arrow, for the spot where stood the Dandy Sport.

Crash! The rickety structure went down like a tenpin before the terrific shock; while Arnold suddenly found himself taking an involuntary plunge through vacancy.

Down he went—dropping plump into the arms of a rider, at that instant passing underneath!

The horseman was a tall, powerful fellow; and as the sport landed unceremoniously across the saddle, he dropped the rein, and clasped him tightly in his arms, at the same time putting spurs to his steed, and giving a prolonged whistle that rose, loud and clear, above the noise of the melee.

It would appear that Arnold's capture was the chief object of the attack; for when the evidently pre-arranged whistle rung out, every horseman evinced his desire to escape from the scene as speedily as he had come.

Owing to the terror-stricken condition of the Canyon Cityites, this feat was by no means difficult; and in less than two minutes after the first furious charge, the mysterious band was riding away like a whirlwind, bearing the wizard pitcher in their midst.

Precipitated headlong from his elevated position, Algernon was partially stunned by the fall, and lay motionless in the grasp of his brawny captor. The latter was quick to take advantage of the young man's helpless condition, and, with wonderful dexterity, passed a stout thong around his waist, tightly pinioning his arms.

So the Dandy Sport, on regaining possession of his faculties, found himself as powerless as a child.

Speedily leaving the camp behind, the band of marauders rode into the gloomy precincts of Spirit Canyon, and without once slackening rein, thundered recklessly over the perilous trail.

As may be imagined, Algernon Arnold was greatly surprised at the novel position in which he now found himself. Adventures were flowing upon him thick and fast; but this latest escapade was much more exciting than pleasant, and its meaning too obscure for the young man's comprehension. Who his captors were, where they were taking him, and for what purpose, he could only leave for the future to reveal.

Down the gloomy canyon dashed the strange cavalcade the hoof beats of the horses awakening weird echoes among the mountain walls.

Not a word was spoken, until, when fully a mile had been traversed, the leader suddenly blew a shrill blast—a signal that caused every rider to instantly rein in his steed.

Then a number of torches were produced and lighted, and by their feeble radiance, the prisoner was enabled to gain a faint inkling of his whereabouts.

Eagerly, Algernon Arnold scanned the faces of his captors. He could readily discern the features of those nearest him, as they made no effort to conceal them; and as he gazed, the sport saw with surprise that the surrounding men were not utter strangers. Many of the faces he had seen before, that afternoon, among the citizens of Silverton; ay, more than one man he recognized as members of the base ball nine, to whom he was instrumental in administering a crushing defeat.

A faint gleam of the truth now began to dawn upon the young man's mind, as he anxiously scrutinized the men from Silverton.

Stern and voiceless, the party gathered about their captive. The wizard pitcher was unceremoniously bundled from the horse, and made to stand erect, with his back to the canyon wall.

Algernon could see from the stern and angry demeanor of his captors, that something serious was to follow, but the young collegian allowed none of his customary coolness to forsake him. With the utmost indifference, he regarded the gang who gathered around him and glared in ominous silence. Arnold was the first to break the ice.

"Gentlemen, this silence is growing monotonous," he declared. "Why don't you say something, and not stand here staring like a pack of dumb brutes? I am fairly bubbling over with anxiety to learn why I am torn away from a scene of festivity, and brought to this lonesome place. If you want me to participate in another celebration, why I beg most emphatically to be excused, as I have already had fun enough for one night."

A stalwart, bearded fellow, who had that afternoon acted as captain of the Silverton

nine, now stepped forward and confronted the Dandy Sport.

"You are not wrong in your conjectures, stranger," he exclaimed. "We *did* bring you here to take part in a bit o' sport, jest as a sorter afterpiece to the fandango over to the city, yonder. The Canyon folks seem so proud of yer, that we hev decided to lay 'way over their racket, an' give yer a pleasant entertainment, not down on the bills."

"Indeed! How kind of you, to be sure."

"You see, we hev assigned the chief part in the programme to you; but I s'pose when you learn what it is, you'll kick like a mule. An' Ole Nick hisself couldn't blame yer. Ha, ha!"

"My Christian friend, your language is too obscure for my comprehension," gravely exclaimed the Dandy Sport. "Please come to the point at once, and put an end to this foolishness."

"Ther end will cum all too soon, don't yer worry 'bout that. Now, my gay young leather-twister, let's get down ter solid, hard-pan business. Ter commence with, do you know who we are?"

"I have seen some of you before, certainly," admitted the Wizard, with a sarcastic smile.

"Then, seein' as how ye recognize us, mebber you've got sense enuff to suspicion what we're hyar for. Young man, behold in us a dread tribunal, representing the mighty burgh of Silverton, whose sole object hyar to-night is ter wipe out ther lickin' that you, cuss you, give ter us this afternoon. Ay, look on us, you infernal monkey, an' tremble clear to the bottom of yer patern-leather boots, for we are hyar on biz an' thar's blood in our eyes."

"Well?"

"Our fame is gone an' so is our money, an' you are the cause of it. We could hev cleaned out the camp easy, if you hadn't stuck your infernal nose inter the pie. You had no bizness ter meddle with the game, anyway, an' we hev resolved to hev our revenge, an' put ye where all sich extraordinary ball-tossers kin be dispensed with. So say yer prayers, Mr. Pitcher, if yer knows enny, 'cause time is short, an' we've got a long road ter travel."

Algernon Arnold stared at the speaker in amazement, and when he finished speaking, a loud laugh escaped the lips of the Dandy Sport.

"This beats everything in my varied experience!" he exclaimed, amusedly. "It strikes me that the East and West are greatly at variance as regards base-ball. Out there, to be sure, we occasionally mob the umpire, just to vary the monotony; but never does the unsuccessful club seek the lives of its opponents, simply because they have been beaten in a fair and square game. Verily, gentlemen, you have a forcible way of doing things here in the rowdy West."

The Silvertonian laughed demoniacally.

"Your opinion 'll be strengthened afore many minutes," he said, grimly.

"Come, men, get to work an' dispose of this young Dandy without further palaver. Too much time has been lost already. Make haste, or we shall have the gang from Canyon City at our heels."

Several stalwart fellows advanced and seized the sport. The cords about his waist were cast off, leaving his arms free; but at the same time he was held fast in a grip impossible to shake off. Next, a long rope was produced, at one end of which nimble fingers quickly formed a slip-knot. This was dropped over Arnold's head, and drawn taut about his breast just below the arms.

Up to this time, the base-ball sport, not in the least alarmed, had treated the adventure in the light of a huge joke; but these ominous preparations caused him no little uneasiness.

"Pardon me, gents," he said calmly, "but I think this farce has gone about far enough. Be good enough to tell me what you propose to do?"

"Simply to fire you into Satan's Kettle," announced the Silverton leader, grimly. "You'll never play ball ag'in, my festive dude! Ha, ha!"

Brave though he was, the young Easterner shuddered, and his face grew ashy pale. There could be no doubt now but what the men of Silverton were terribly in earnest. Maddened by defeat, they were determined to have vengeance on the young man who had caused their discomfiture.

Plainly there was no hope for mercy. A glance into the sea of faces revealed not a look of pity. Algernon Arnold, the Wizard Arm, was doomed!

It was a terrible scene, upon which the flaring torches shed their weird and fitful gleam.

This stern voice of the leader broke the death-like stillness.

"Hurry, boys! Over with him!"

Willing hands grasped the rope, while others urged the victim to the very brink of the precipice. In an instant the luckless sport was lowered as far as the length of the rope would admit, into the dismal depths of the frightful abyss!

"Hold tight, boys, and drop 'er when I give the word. Steady, now! One, two, three!"

The Dandy Sport poised motionless for an instant in mid-air; then, with a last, long, despairing cry, shot like a bullet, down—down into the horrible depths of Satan's Kettle!

CHAPTER XII.

UNDERGROUND.

Down, like a stone, shot the Dandy Sport through the vacant air! Down—down, into the unknown depths of Satan's Kettle, from which strange, weird sounds ascended, as of countless demons eager to claim their newest victim!

Down—down with the velocity of a rifle-shot, not to be dashed to fragments upon jagged rocks, but to find himself immersed in water of extraordinary depth!

Fortunately, Arnold had maintained an upright position throughout the terrible descent, and now struck the water feet first, shooting beneath the surface like a flash.

Down he went, till it seemed the bottom would never be reached; then, rebounding like a rubber ball, shot up to the surface again.

His breath fairly forced from his body by the rush of air, Algernon lost all consciousness during the frightful descent; but the icy water revived him, and he opened his eyes to find himself floating calmly on the surface.

Stiff and sore, and gasping for breath, the young man looked bewilderedly about him, wondering where he was, and scarcely crediting the fact that he was still in the land of the living.

It was, indeed, a miraculous escape. Only the extreme depth of the stream at that particular point had, by breaking the force of the fall, saved him from instant death.

The sport was faint and weak, his brain spun round like a top, and it was only by a supreme effort that he kept from sinking again beneath the surface. Besides, the water was icy cold, and chilled him to the bone, adding to his misery the prospect of soon perishing, unless he speedily escaped from the treacherous element.

It was impossible to locate his whereabouts, for night covered the scene with her inky pall. Impenetrable blackness reigned on every hand.

Algernon only knew that he was in the stream flowing at the bottom of Spirit Canyon, and that the current was steadily bearing him in some unknown direction.

His first thought was to escape from the icy element that chilled him through and through. Reaching vaguely forward in the darkness, his hand encountered a rocky wall.

Eagerly clutching a projecting point, the sport, bending all his energies to the task, succeeded in dragging himself from the water.

He judged he was upon a sort of rocky platform, amply wide enough to form a resting-place for his weary body, and Arnold wisely concluded to wait and recover some of his lost strength, ere continuing his investigations.

Being destitute of light—not possessing even a match—he could only conjecture as to his whereabouts. One thing was certain, however. He was somewhere at the bottom of Spirit Canyon, and how he could ever reach the trail, a hundred feet above, was a question that puzzled him not a little.

After resting a few minutes, the young collegian felt strong enough to proceed. He made his way carefully on hands and knees, cautiously feeling every foot of ground, lest he should be suddenly precipitated into some unseen abyss.

It was apparent that he was now in a rude sort of tunnel, and after progressing some distance without coming to a terminus, a most unpleasant idea suddenly occurred to the young adventurer.

Instead of being in the canyon bed, as he at first supposed, the sport had been caught up by the swiftly-running waters, and wafted through some yawning fissure in the rugged wall. At this moment he was underground, in the very heart of the mountain, hopelessly lost, with darkness his only companion.

Strange as it might seem, the more he pondered, the stronger grew his convictions that such was indeed the case. Utterly bewildered, the Dandy hesitated.

However, there was no alternative but to

press forward. Behind him lay nothing but the icy waters; in front of him was—what? The open air, perhaps—light and liberty! The thought inspired the adventurer with renewed hope.

Slowly Algernon moved forward, eagerly following the serpentine course of the mysterious underground passage, hopeful that it would at length lead him to the open air.

Suddenly a light appeared ahead. It was not a brilliant light, but a dull, phosphorescent glow, that seemed weird and unearthly, contrasted with the intense gloom of the passage. Surely no common fire ever emitted such a wondrous glow; there was something supernatural in its appearance, and Arnold felt a peculiar sensation creeping up and down his spine. But the young man never faltered. There was nothing superstitious about his nature, and after the first start of surprise, he deliberately made his way toward the mystical light.

Nearer and nearer he approached, only to pause at last, a cry of unfeigned astonishment welling from his lips.

The tunnel had terminated; and the adventurer now stood at the entrance to a spacious cavern, the roof and walls of which were adorned with all the wealth and beauty of nature's handiwork, forming a spectacle wonderful to contemplate.

Hundreds of beautiful stalactites, wreathed into all manner of fantastic shapes, hung pendent from the roof of the chamber, reflecting all the varied tints of the rainbow, and glittering like diamonds in the soft, mellow light. Curiously shaped stalagmites covered the rocky floor, while the walls on all sides exhibited the wondrous result of nature's marvelous handiwork.

Illuminated by a strange, mellow radiance, coming from some invisible source, the underground chamber presented a scene of dazzling splendor. The marveling observer might be pardoned if he imagined himself suddenly transported to the magic realms described by the Arabian Nights.

Astonished beyond measure, Algernon Arnold stared interestedly at the wondrous scene. He had heard of these stalactic caverns, but the beauty and grandeur of the specimen before him far eclipsed his most vivid imagination.

But whence came the spectral light that pervaded the chamber, touching each object with its mellow glow?

The Dandy Sport reached up and broke off a glittering pendant; his fingers, upon handling the fragment, emitted the same unearthly light.

The truth was clear enough now. While the ignorant or superstitious would ascribe the strange illumination to supernatural causes; yet it was, nevertheless, caused by the action of peculiar chemical properties in the atmosphere, phosphorus predominating.

For some moments the adventurer stood within the chamber, forgetting his own misfortunes, as he contemplated the beauties of the scene before him.

Suddenly a faint sound reached the young man's ears, breaking the deathlike silence that pervaded the cave. Attentively he listened.

He was not mistaken. What was undoubtedly the sound of approaching footsteps, warned him he was about to have company in the underground chamber. Arnold hastily dodged into a convenient recess, where he could see and not be seen.

Who was the new-comer—friend or foe, spirit or mortal? The Dandy Sport did not have to wait long for an answer, for suddenly a tall, gaunt form appeared within the illuminated space, coming from a point directly opposite Algernon's hiding-place.

And as the new-comer paused, intense excitement written on his countenance as his eyes fell upon the glittering scene, the heart of the watcher gave a tumultuous leap, for he recognized his recently-found friend—Tommy the Kid!

With a joyous shout, Arnold bounded from his hiding-place, and confronted the startled Kid. Enough had already been revealed to Tommy to astonish him exceedingly, and now the unexpected appearance of the sport served to complete his amazement.

With blanched face and shivering frame, the boy sleuth, firmly believing he was confronted by an apparition, sunk tremblingly upon the stony floor, wildly waving back the supposed phantom. But Algernon's cheery voice reassured him.

"Come, Tommy, my man, brace up and have some style about you! Don't lie there shaking and shivering like an Alabama nigger, down with the ague. What's the matter, I say?"

Though with considerable reluctance, Tommy the Kid ventured to grasp the outstretched hand; and the process proved to him that it was no ghost with whom he was dealing, but really the dandy pitcher in the flesh.

"Great jumpin' tomcats! Who'd a-thought of finding you here?" he managed to splutter. "Hang me fer a Chinyman, if this 'ere don't beat the Dutch!"

Mutual explanations were now in order. As soon as he had recovered his equanimity sufficiently, Tommy the Kid hastened to give the sport a detailed account of his doings since they parted more than four-and-twenty hours before. He told how he had overheard the conversation between Ray and Cool Carl, and thus learned the secret of the New Yorker's visit to Canyon City; then he rehearsed Reginald's desperate flight and subsequent capture, and related his own bold but unsuccessful attempt to rescue the prisoners.

"Ye see," he explained, by way of conclusion, "when the galoots drove me inter the tunnel an' blocked up the entrance, I made up my mind things wuz gettin' too all-fired warm for comfort in that quarter; so I determined to investigate a bit, hoping to escape in this direction, an' so fool the chaps that had me shut up like a rat in a trap. I soon caught sight of this light, and hastened this way; so hyar I am."

Arnold listened with rapt attention to his young friend's rehearsal. Everything was a revelation to him; for so exciting and varied had been his experience for the past day and night, he had no opportunity to see, or hear from, his New York friends. It was gratifying to learn at last the object of Ray's trip to Canyon City, and get to the bottom of Cool Carl's scheme; and the young man now saw that his early suspicion of foul play had not been without good foundation. The fact that Reginald and his lovely niece were already in the gambler's clutches, caused the sport no little uneasiness, and he resolved to lose no time in hastening to the rescue.

"There's stern work cut out for us, Tommy," declared Arnold, determinedly. "The prisoners must be saved at once, if human skill can accomplish it. I can rely on your assistance?"

"Can ye? Ole pard, kin a duck swim?" and the honest hand of the mountain boy sought the dainty palm of the Dandy Sport.

"Good! We must force an entrance to the cavern, if possible, before Cool Carl returns. You know the way, Tommy, so lead on! There's no time to waste."

The gallant rescuers at once plunged into the dismal passage, leaving the fairy grotto, with its gleaming walls, behind.

CHAPTER XIII. TO THE RESCUE.

TOMMY THE KID glided like a shadow through the underground passage, with the Dandy Sport close at his heels, grim and determined.

As he proceeded, Arnold took the precaution to look to his weapons and see that they were in serviceable condition. "Tenderfoot" though was, the youth had already learned one thoroughly Western trick—that of concealing a revolver in each sleeve, attached to a powerful elastic cord, so that, while concealed from view, a dexterous movement of the arm would send the weapon into the owner's hand, ready for use.

Thus hidden, the weapons had escaped the eyes of the Silverton gang, and Wizard Arm was still possessor of an elegant brace of "sixes," capable of doing efficient service in practiced hands.

Tommy the Kid led the way without much difficulty, until at length they found further progress effectually barred by the mass of stone that blocked the passage.

"Stop here for refreshments!" announced the mountain boy, grimly. "Cool Carl's men hev writ 'No thoroughfare' all over this rock, an' I reckon we'll hev to cum to a period—which is to say, a full stop."

"Not much! No such frail obstacle shall prevent us from accomplishing our purpose, declared the Dandy, vehemently. "Brace up, now, Tommy, and push with all your strength."

The lad cheerfully obeyed, and together the pair pushed and shoved, straining every nerve, but in vain! As well might they have essayed to set aside the very mountains. The ruffians within the cave had done their work well, for the ponderous mass, wedged tightly into the opening, obstinately refused to stir a hair.

Realizing the folly of wasting strength for so useless a purpose, Arnold gave up the attempt in disgust. The sport was deeply chagrined to find his advance cut off so effectually. He

chafed with impatience to reach the chamber wherein his friends were confined, but, as things were now situated, such an achievement seemed impossible.

Wizard Arm was in despair; but suddenly he remembered a small flask of gunpowder, which he carried in an inside pocket. Eagerly the young man drew it forth.

"The way is clear enough, now," he exclaimed, elatedly. "Brimstone and saltpeter shall accomplish what muscle and sinew have failed to do."

"I opine ye mean ter blow the rock away, eh?"

"Exactly. But, hold! I have no means of igniting the compound. This is, indeed, unfortunate. Oh, for one solitary match!"

Tommy the Kid immediately produced a handful of Lucifers.

"Behold ther necessary timber!" he said, gleefully. "I'm a reg'lar walkin' match-box."

Wizard Arm at once set to work preparing the blast. He poured the whole of the flask's contents into a hastily-dug hole beneath the stone; then laid a tiny train of powder for a distance of several feet. Soon everything was in readiness.

Tommy the Kid discreetly retreated some distance down the passage.

Striking a match, the sport stooped and deliberately applied the flame to the powder-train; then, as the destructive spark shot hissing forward like a fiery serpent, he turned and fled through the tunnel for his life.

Boom! The blast exploded with the sound of a dozen cannons, fairly shaking the cavern walls, and sending a shower of fragments into the air.

Wizard Arm and the mountain boy were prostrated by the shock, but instantly were upon their feet instantly, ready for action.

"There could be no doubt but that the explosion had answered the purpose for which it was designed, for light in the chamber could be seen through the now open mouth of the passage!"

Scarcely had the echoes died away, when the two pards, with ready weapons, rushed resolutely into the cavern. The Dandy Sport was in advance, and as he bounded into the chamber, an exciting scene met his eyes.

The flaring torch-light revealed the occupants of the cavern, all in a state of intense excitement, caused by the terrific explosion. The followers of Cool Carl, now reduced to four, stood, motionless as statues, near the center of the apartment, too bewildered to move a finger. The two prisoners crouched trembling in a distant corner.

Such was the situation when the sport burst into the underground chamber, with Tommy the Kid close at his heels.

At sight of them, Cool Carl's men began to realize the true condition of affairs. Rousing to action, they all sprung forward, their hands seeking ready pistols; but, before they could level their weapons, Arnold opened the ball.

Crack! crack! The walls of the cavern resounded with the spiteful reports of the sport's revolver, while the Kid came up bravely by his partner's side, and used his shooter with the coolness of a veteran.

One of Cool Carl's gang fell backward, with a bullet in his brain; another went to the floor, mortally wounded. The two remaining ruffians, losing courage at the fall of their comrades, turned and fled from the deadly fusillade.

Shot after shot followed them, the bullets whistling viciously about their ears, as they fled into the tunnel.

The conflict was over; though brief, it was decisive, and the two pards were left masters of the situation.

Arnold at once hastened to the captive's side, and as may be imagined, they were rejoiced to see him again. Reginald Ray was speedily relieved of his bonds, and at once proceeded to relate his experience; but the sport good-naturedly cut him short.

"Spare yourself the waste of time and breath, my friend, since I already know everything," he said.

"What?" interrogated the New Yorker, in astonishment.

"Yes; I understand it all. I know who brought you here, and for what purpose. Where I obtained my information, it matters not. Suffice it to say—I am pleased to be instrumental in saving you from the clutches of Cool Carl."

"A task which is not yet fully accomplished, I fear," declared Ray, apprehensively. "True, we are for the present triumphant, but remember, the two fellows who escaped will carry the news to Cool Carl. Instant pursuit, of course,

will follow. I understand that the gambler is very powerful here, controlling the entire camp. Against such numbers, resistance would be useless. Alas! I fear we are doomed."

Arnold smiled self-confidently.

"Don't let that worry you, my friend," he responded, assuringly. "Things in Canyon City have changed considerably in the past twenty-four hours. In that time I have obtained a degree of popularity, which, I am conceited enough to believe, the efforts of Cool Carl will fail to overcome."

"But enough of this. Let us leave this dismal place, and return to the camp. Once there, we shall be better prepared to face Cool Carl."

Reginald Ray willingly acquiesced, being thankful enough to escape from the irksome prison. While wondering at Arnold's assurance, yet he forbore from questioning, as he saw the sport was disinclined to vouchsafe any further information.

Without further delay, the party prepared to return to Canyon City. Leaving the underground chamber, they proceeded cautiously through the passage. Tommy the Kid led the way, while the others followed in single file.

The end of the secret tunnel was soon reached, and the quartet stepped out into the canyon, rejoiced to breathe pure air once more; but as they left the passage, it was only to start quickly back again, in utter dismay at the sight they saw!

Drawn up in line, directly opposite the opening, stood a squad of stalwart fellows, grim and motionless as figures of stone. They were armed to the teeth, each man clutching a brace of leveled revolvers, the barrels of which were concentrated upon one common mark—the heads of Wizard Arm and his three companions.

It was not difficult to recognize the party as Cool Carl's sympathizers. Indeed, two of their number were the very ruffians who had succeeded in making their escape from the cavern—sole survivors of the Dandy Sport's fierce onslaught.

As luck would have it, these fellows had fallen in with a number of their associates, while fleeing down the canyon; and now, with desperate resolve, they sought to turn the tables.

"Hands up! We've got you covered, so thar's no use kickin'," growled the nearest rough, and it was plain that the gang meant business.

Taken by surprise, the sport's party had no alternative but to obey. There was no denying the fact that the gambler's hirelings held the drop, and to offer resistance under such unfavorable circumstances meant certain annihilation.

Reluctantly the discomfited sport elevated his hands, an example that was immediately followed by his companions.

Highly elated at their success, the ruffians advanced to disarm and bind the prisoners. But this task was never accomplished.

At this moment the sound of many excited voices broke suddenly upon their ears, as a large body of men, whose approach had been concealed by an abrupt turn in the trail, now appeared upon the scene.

Confusedly they swarmed through the canyon, and as the party approached, Wizard Arm gave a joyful shout, for he recognized the new-comers as his friends, the men of Canyon City.

Startled by this unexpected interruption, the gambler's gang turned, forgetting for the moment their intended prisoners.

Arnold was quick to seize the golden opportunity. Like lightning he leaped forward with leveled weapons. Tommy the Kid was scarcely a second behind him.

Crack! crack! And as the pistols spoke spitefully, two of Cool Carl's followers threw up their arms and fell headlong to the earth.

Wizard Arm was not slow to follow up his advantage, and fiercely pressed the demoralized ruffians, firing shot after shot with fatal effect.

Panic-stricken, the toughs fled from before the deadly storm of lead, only to be met by the surging mob of Canyon Cityites, who, comprehending how matters stood, were making all possible haste to reach the scene.

Hemmed in on all sides, there was no escape for the cut-throats, who were speedily overwhelmed and made prisoners.

Wizard Arm hastened to meet his friends, the men of Canyon City, by whom he was enthusiastically greeted. They explained their presence at so opportune a moment by the intelligence that all the camp had turned out to hunt for the missing sport, this being one of the various parties sent out to scour the country in every direction.

Arnold hastened to enlighten the "cits" regarding his experience since being torn so unceremoniously from their midst; after which, he edified his listeners with a brief story of Cool Carl's treachery toward the Rays.

The Dandy Sport shrewdly relied upon his lately-achieved popularity to turn the tide of public sentiment against the gambler king; nor was the result different from what he anticipated.

Among the better portion of Canyon City's inhabitants, hardly a man was there who did not hate and fear the arrogant "boss" of the camp; and now they hailed with joy an opportunity to crush the gambler, with such an able man as the Dandy Sport to lead them.

Without further delay, the party started on the return to Canyon City.

Little did Cool Carl, at that moment secure within his gilded den, dream of the threatening storm-cloud hovering over his head, so soon to burst and send him to destruction!

The gambler King of Canyon City was taking his ease in his own private room, at the rear of the Miners' Home. There was a self-satisfied expression on the tiger's face, as, tipped carelessly back in a chair, he puffed leisurely at a fragrant cigar.

"Cool Carl, you're a trump! Of all the great games of a lifetime, this one takes the cake, both for unparalleled audacity and unqualified success. Reginald, poor fool, swallowed the bait without the slightest suspicion; and now the game is entirely in my hands. Let me see! I will first hasten to unite myself to the lovely Rachel, after which her worthy uncle will find hard work to leave Canyon City alive. With him out of the way, of course his niece will come into possession of his big fortune; and then who will have a better right to enjoy it than I her worthy husband?"

Laughing exultantly at the pleasing prospect, Cool Carl rose, threw aside his weed, and sauntered out into the bar-room.

It was early morning, and the Miners' Home was deserted. The only occupant was the bartender, who leaned languidly against the bar, and looked in vain for a customer.

"Give me an eye-opener, Jerry," commanded Cool Carl. "And tell me, what means this unwonted quiet? The whole camp seems deserted."

"It's all on account of ther base-ball sharp—him as how they calls Wizard Arm," glibly explained the bartender, as he hastened to mix his employer's favorite drink. "You see, the dude cum up missin' during the celebration, last night, an' durn me if ev'ry galoot in town hasn't turned out to look for him."

"I hope they never find him!" declared the 'King-Pin,' viciously. "Something tells me that infernal young ball-sharp will yet cause me trouble. Fool that I was to intercede in his behalf, when the crowd threatened to lynch him. Hark! what's that?"

From without suddenly came a tumultuous uproar—the sound of tramping feet and excited voices.

"The cits hev returned," announced Jerry, "an' from the noise they make, I should judge they hev found the Dandy Sport. They are comin' this way, too—it'll make bizness good!"

With an impatient gesture, Cool Carl raised the glass to his lips, but before he could drink, the door flew suddenly open, and an excited mob poured into the saloon.

A savage scowl and imprecation escaped the boss of the camp, while the glass dropped from his nerveless hand, for among the party he recognized Reginald and Rachel Ray, whom he had supposed were at that moment close prisoners in the underground chamber!

Beside them stood Arnold, smiling serenely.

"Good-morning, Cool Carl!" saluted the Dandy Sport; "glad to find you at home, for we have important business with you."

Fairly petrified with amazement, the gambler king stood for an instant like an image of stone. He needed no second glance to convince him of the truth; the presence of the Rays was sufficient to tell him that the game was up.

With a snarl like that of a wounded tiger, Cool Carl sprang forward. Like lightning he whipped a revolver from his belt, and fired at Reginald Ray.

So sudden was the movement, its fatal results could not be avoided. The New Yorker staggered back, then fell lifeless to the floor.

Like a madman Cool Carl leaped into the crowd, firing recklessly right and left. So impetuous was his assault, that the crowd actually wavered, but Wizard Arm was equal to the occasion.

Bending forward, he dealt the infuriated gambler a terrible blow upon the temple. Cool Carl staggered, and before he could recover, the crowd pounced upon him and bore him to the floor.

Meanwhile, willing hands lifted the form of Reginald Ray, but it was too late. Cool Carl's bullet sped swift and true, and the soul of the New Yorker had fled to the one who gave it.

It was an excited mob that swarmed through the streets of Canyon City that sunny morning. Popular sentiment was against the gambler king, and there could be but one result. Within an hour, all that remained of Cool Carl dangled from the nearest tree!

A few days later, the outward-bound stage-coach carried three passengers from Canyon City.

The first was Rachel Ray, niece of the unfortunate merchant, whose remains were left to decay upon the very scene of his former transgressions. The young lady, half-crazed with grief and excitement, was thankful to leave the place so associated with miserable memories and sorrows.

The second passenger was Algernon Arnold, whose presence had caused such a sensation in the wild mining-camp. The young man's appetite for adventure was completely surfeited, and he longed to return to a civilized clime. He found it a very convenient, as well as pleasant duty, to act as escort to the fair Eastern girl.

The third of the trio was no other than Tommy the Kid. The brave mountain boy had become greatly attached to the Dandy, and gladly accepted the latter's invitation to accompany him to his far-off home. As he left no one in particular to mourn his loss, the lad found no difficulty in tearing himself away from the scene of his rough and tumble life.

Canyon City was loth to part with her guests, and the citizens turned out, *en masse*, to give them a hearty send-off.

Arrived safely at their Eastern home, Arnold did not allow his interest in Rachel Ray to flag; and now there is an excellent prospect of a wedding in the near future, in which these young people will be the parties most particularly concerned.

Tommy the Kid is rapidly growing used to the ways of the crowded busy East, and bids fair to become not so much "an ornament to society" as a very useful and successful man of business.

Canyon City at once resumed its accustomed routine. Like many other played-out mining-camps, it has relapsed into a state of "innocuous desuetude." But the old-timers still love to congregate at the Miners' Home, and tell the wonderful stories of the youth who won from them the sobriquet of Wizard Arm, the Dandy Sport!

THE END.

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